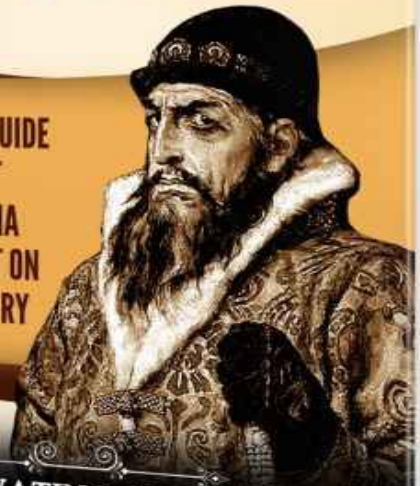
RUSSIAN HISTORY

A CAPTIVATING GUIDE TO THE HISTORY OF RUSSIA, INCLUDING EVENTS SUCH AS THE MONGOL INVASION, THE NAPOLEONIC INVASION, REFORMS OF PETER THE GREAT, THE FALL OF THE SOVIET UNION, AND MORE

CAPTIVATING HISTORY

IVAN THE TERRIBLE

A CAPTIVATING GUIDE TO THE FIRST TSAR OF RUSSIA AND HIS IMPACT ON RUSSIAN HISTORY



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THE RUSSIAN REVOLUTION

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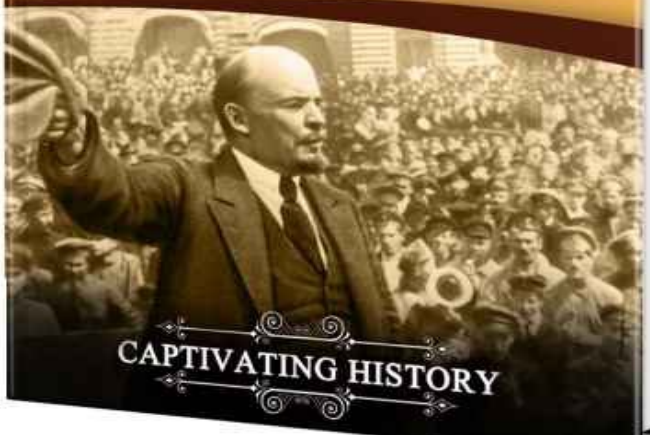

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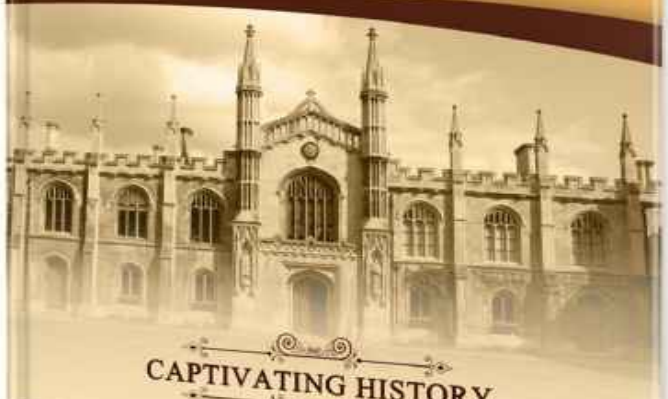

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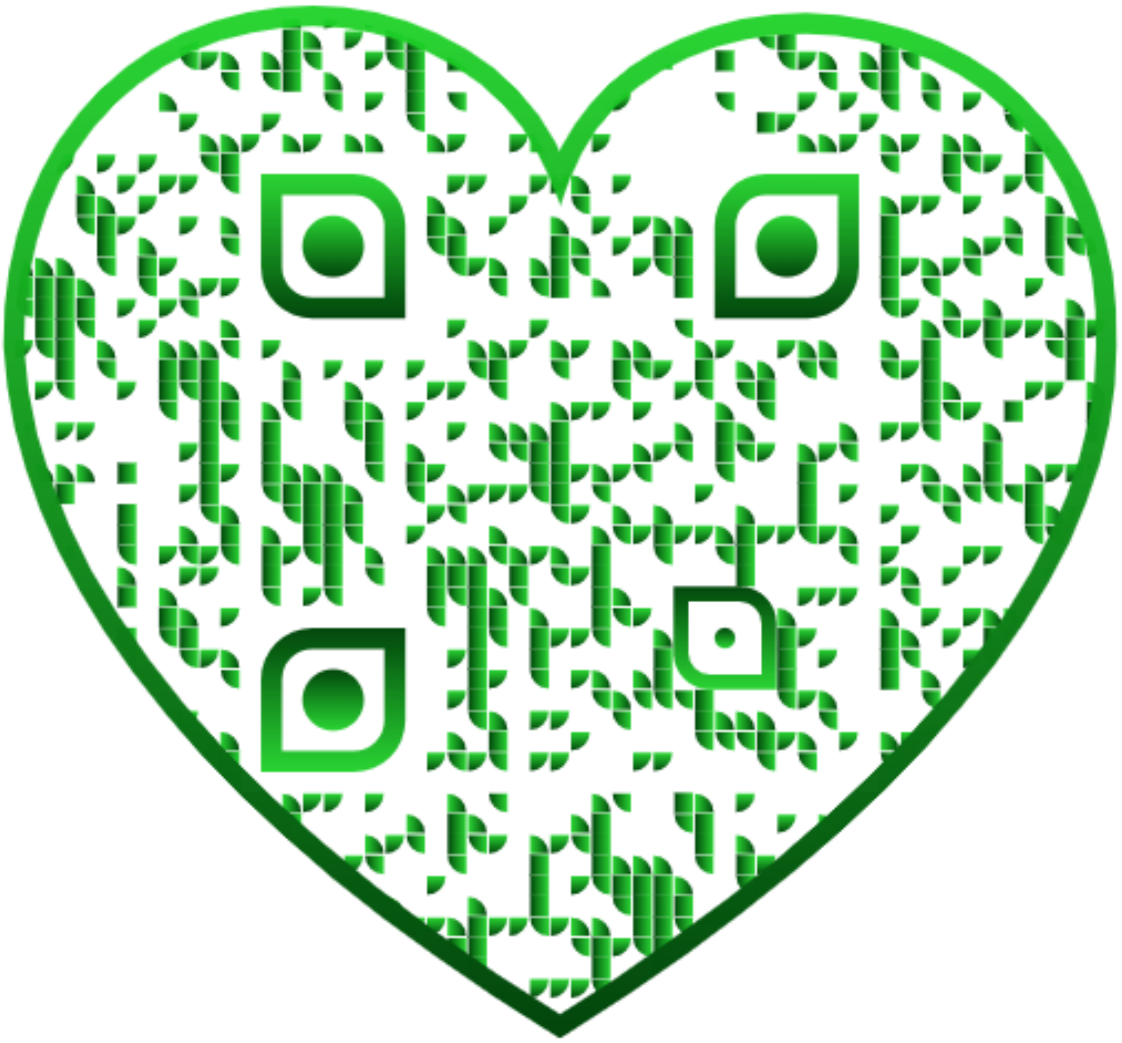

History of Russia

A Captivating Guide to Russian History, Ivan the Terrible, The Russian Revolution and Cambridge Five

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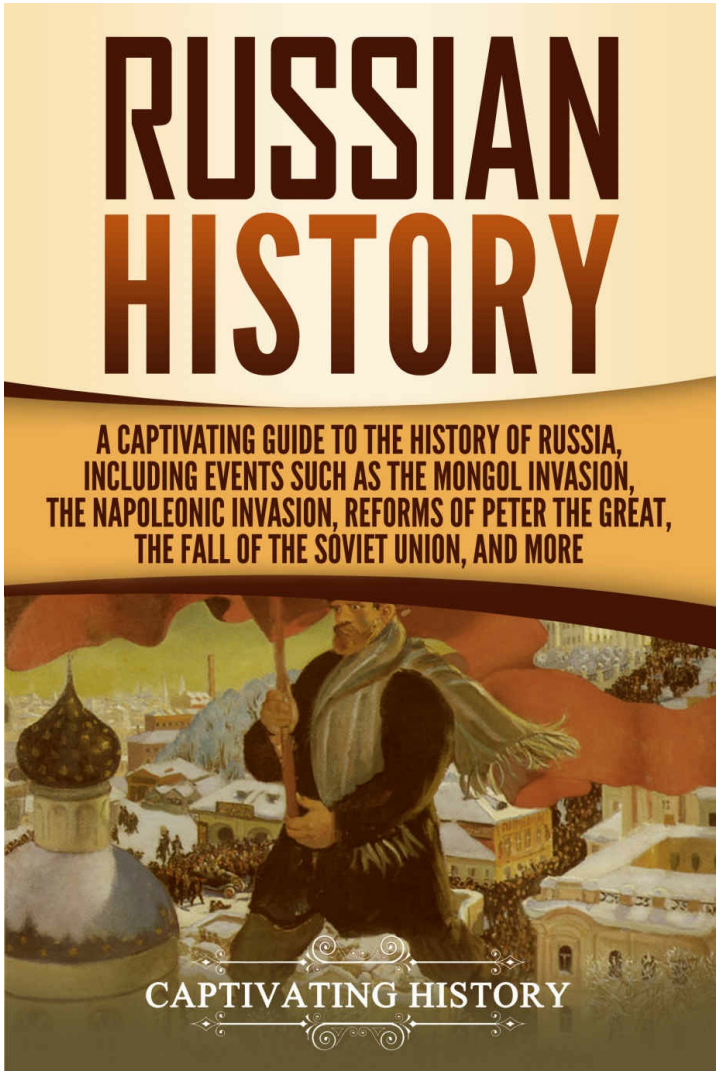
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CAPTIVATING HISTORY

Introduction

Russia, or the Russian Federation as it is officially known, is the world's largest country and covers almost a sixth of the global landmass. The country is often associated with harsh climates and autocratic government. The shadow of communism and the Cold War continues to influence global attitudes towards Russia. The Russian state – with regard to its territory – only took shape in the early modern era, around the turn of the eighteenth century. It claims descent from a political entity known as Kievan Rus, centered in the capital of modern Ukraine, although the connection is at best indirect. The questions of historical legitimacy have attracted greater interest in the context of recent political and military conflict between Russia and Ukraine. The process of the formation of the Russian state took place over several centuries and at several junctures history could have taken a different course. This book serves as an overview of Russian history over the span of more than a millennium, from the foundation of the Russian state by the Viking prince Rurik in 862 AD until the collapse of the Soviet Union at the end of 1991.

For the purposes of simplicity, the book takes a chronological approach. Part 1 (Chapters 1-6) covers the Russian state, referred to by contemporaries as Rus, from its foundation by Rurik until the extinction of the Rurikid dynasty at the end of the 16th century. This section covers some of the most important processes which shaped Russian history, including the Christianization of Rus by Prince Vladimir the Great, the Mongol conquest, the rise of Moscow and the efforts to achieve independence from Mongol and Tatar overlords. Part 2 (Chapters 7-13) charts the fortunes of Russia under the rule of the Romanov dynasty. During the 300 years of Romanov rule, Russia established itself as a major European power, establishing control of the Baltic under Peter the Great, expanding southwest under Catherine the Great, and defeating Napoleon under Alexander I. This era ended in 1917 in the midst of war and revolution. Part 3 (Chapters 14-18) covers the period of communist rule in Russia. In less than a century the Soviet Union aimed to build a radical socialist utopia, established a sinister dictatorship, contributed to victory in the Second World War, and struggled with the United States for global hegemony before its demise in the 1980s.

This book primarily presents a political history of Russia. Although it is possible to outline a history of Russia using a social, economic, or cultural

perspective, history is usually simplest to follow when associated with rulers and individuals. This approach is made easier by the fact that Russian history is full of fascinating personalities, both men and women, from Saint Olga of Kiev and Catherine the Great to Ivan the Terrible and Josef Stalin. Through these individuals, this book seeks to bring Russian history to life for readers. Although some of the episodes mentioned in this book may appear fantastical or incredible, or seeming to be stories from the past with little relevance to modern society, they have shaped the development of the Russian state in its current form. Nation-states around the world look into the pages of history to inform national identity, and Russia is no different. This book strives to identify some of the key themes of Russian history and to highlight their importance both in contemporary Russia and worldwide.

Part 1 – Medieval Rus

Chapter 1 – The Foundation of Rus

Several tribes and peoples occupied what is now Eastern Europe in the centuries following the collapse of the Roman Empire. The major ethnic group were the Slavs, a term derived from *slovo*, meaning "word," denoting people who spoke the same language. By the 6th and 7th centuries, there were three major branches of Slavic tribes. The East Slavs occupied much of the Russian heartland and Ukraine, together with parts of modern-day Belarus. The South Slavs occupied much of the Balkan peninsula, while the West Slavs were based in what is now Poland. Some Slavs lived under the rule of Turkic peoples such as the Avars, Bulgars, and Khazars. Baltic tribes such as the Prus, Livs, Curs, Chuds, lived by the Baltic Sea, while much of the north and east was occupied by Finno-Ugric peoples. Though subsequent conflict and conquest resulted in the migration and displacement of some of these peoples, there is much genealogical evidence for mixed marriages and family relations. Consequently, the ethnic make-up of Russians today, while predominantly Slavic, also includes Finnish, Scandinavian, Turkic and Baltic elements.

Most of these peoples were pagans who worshipped deities based on natural phenomena, even if their gods had different names. The most important god in Eastern Slavic paganism was Perun, the God of Thunder, who may be most closely compared to Thor in Norse mythology, or Zeus in the Greek pantheon. Perun's counterpart and opponent was Volos, most frequently associated with the earth and waters. Slavic pagans also saw spirits inhabiting lakes, rivers, and forests. The invocation of natural phenomena and spirits was a key part of pagan rituals and usually associated with the agricultural calendar. Some of the peasant folk dances which originated in pagan rituals invoking the abundant earth continue to survive to this day in rural communities.

In the 9th century, the Slavic lands began to be subjected to raids from the north by Varangians, eastern Vikings who sought to establish a route to Constantinople, the great capital of the Byzantine Empire. The Varangians appear to have managed to exact tribute from some tribes, though the tribes soon rebelled and refused further payment. These tribes began to fight among themselves and any form of law and order that had previously existed

disintegrated. According to the Russian Primary Chronicle, compiled in the early 12th century, the warring tribes were unable to establish a peaceful settlement by themselves and decided to invite a foreign prince to arbitrate over them and restore order. They petitioned a group of Varangians known as the Rus (according to one theory, after their red hair) in the following manner: “Our land is great and rich, but there is no order in it. Come to rule and reign over us.”

It is debatable whether the Rus were invited by all the warring tribes to rule over them, or whether they made alliances with various factions which allowed them to incrementally consolidate their control over what is now northwestern Russia. In any case, the foundation of the Russian state is said to have taken place in 862 with the arrival of the Varangian prince Rurik (862-79) and his two younger brothers. After gaining control of Ladoga, Rurik established himself in a settlement called Holmgard, located on the eastern bank of the River Volkhov as it flows into Lake Ilmen, several miles to the south of the later city of Novgorod. His brothers Sineus and Truvor were based in Beloozero and Izborsk respectively. Within a couple of years, the younger brothers died and Rurik became sole ruler of the land now known as the Rus. From his base in Novgorod, Rurik sent groups men to settle and conquer new territories, expanding his authority to the south and east.

Among Rurik’s followers were two prominent individuals named Askold and Dir. They were sent to Constantinople, the capital of the great Byzantine Empire, which the Slavs called Tsargrad (Caesar’s city). On their way down the River Dniepr, they came across the city of Kiev which at that time was largely populated by a Slavic tribe called the Polianians, but under the rule of the Khazars, a Turkic tribe whose rulers had converted to Judaism. Askold and Dir attacked the Khazars and managed to conquer Kiev, establishing their own power base while Rurik continued to rule in Novgorod. Over time greater numbers of Varangians followed and settled in Kiev and its hinterland, mixing and integrating with the local Slavic population.

When Rurik died in 879 AD, his son Igor was still a young child and unable to take over the reins of power. He therefore left his realm to his kinsman Oleg (879-912), thought to be a brother-in-law. Over the course of the next three years, Oleg led an army of his Slavic and Baltic subjects in order to establish his authority in territories which had rebelled against the Rus upon Rurik’s death. When he arrived in Kiev in 882 AD, he saw that Askold and

Dir were ruling over a magnificent and prosperous city and enjoying luxuries greater than his own, even though he was their sovereign lord. On this basis he believed that Askold and Dir were potential challengers to his authority and devised a plan to eliminate them. He hid his men in his boats and laid ambush on the Kievan rulers. Disguising himself as a messenger, he beckoned them to the river bank, whereupon the soldiers emerged from their boats. “You are not princes nor even of princely stock, but I am of princely birth,” Oleg pronounced to the unsuspecting Askold and Dir. He then presented Igor to them, informing them that the young child was the son of Rurik. At this point the soldiers rushed forward and killed both Askold and Dir.

Through this means Oleg gained control of Kiev. He proclaimed that Kiev would be his capital and the mother of all Russian cities, relegating Novgorod to a subordinate tribute-paying role. For the two following centuries Kiev remained the capital of the Russian cities and its ruler took the title *Velikiy Knyaz*, Grand Prince. The state is now known to history as the Kievan Rus, but this term was not coined until the nineteenth century. Nevertheless, Oleg’s decision to move his capital southwards had significant developments for the Russian state. The center of gravity in Russia moved from the Baltic north to the southern steppes. Not only was the land more fertile, but the city of Kiev was strategically located on the River Dniepr, which flows into the Black Sea. Oleg also moved his center of power closer to Constantinople and the Byzantine Empire.

The Byzantine Empire was the Eastern, Greek-speaking half of the Roman Empire and remained an imperial power after the fall of Rome in the west. Although by the 9th century AD it was no longer as extensive as during its zenith under the Emperor Justinian in the 6th century AD, the Christian empire remained one of Europe’s most powerful and wealthiest states. The relationship with the Byzantine Empire became a key factor in the foreign policy of the Kievan Rus. The two states were in conflict on several occasions. The Russian Primary Chronicle relates an assault on Constantinople in 866 AD led by Askold and Dir, who headed an armada of two hundred ships. The Byzantine Emperor Michael III was isolated and it seemed that the city would fall to the invaders. With few men capable of protecting the city, the inhabitants turned to divine intercession. The Emperor and the Patriarch of Constantinople prayed all night, sang hymns, and carried the Virgin Mary’s robe into the sea. A great storm soon arose, stirring up the

waves and causing the Russian boats to run aground. Suffering heavy losses, the Russians turned back to Kiev.

This unsuccessful attempt did not dissuade the Russians from making further efforts to capture Constantinople. In 907 AD Prince Oleg campaigned against the Greeks and negotiated a favorable peace treaty with the Emperor. The treaty stipulated that Russian merchants trading in Constantinople would receive provisions from the Byzantine state, and that they could carry out their business activities without being subject to taxation. Over the years Kiev and Constantinople would form a close trading relationship. In return, certain restrictions were placed upon the Russian merchants so that they would not pose a threat to the city. To seal the treaty, the Greeks swore an oath on the cross while the pagan Russians swore on their weapons and to the gods Perun and Volos. Upon his return to Kiev, Oleg was hailed by his Slavic subjects for his artful diplomacy and proclaimed “Oleg the Wise.”

In 912, after further strengthening relations with the Byzantine Empire, Oleg died and was succeeded by Igor (912-45), Rurik’s son. Like his predecessor, Igor is said to have ruled over Rus for 33 years, although only the final years of his reign are documented. Near the end of his life he embarked on two campaigns against Constantinople, in 941 and 944 respectively. The Primary Chronicle claims that on this second campaign Igor sailed at the head of ten thousand vessels, but this number is surely unrealistic. Nevertheless, the Russian fleet was formidable and once again the Byzantine Emperor was forced to sue for peace. As part of the terms of this new settlement the Russians were bought off with a large quantity of gold, and their trading privileges in Constantinople were extended. Russians in Constantinople also enjoyed the same judicial rights and punishments as the subjects of the Emperor.

Igor’s campaign in Constantinople coincided with a Russian expedition against the Arabs in the Caucasus. This expedition seems to have been commanded by a warlord named Sveinald, who was nominally under Igor’s service although the sources do not say whether Igor sanctioned the expedition. Sveinald’s raid appears to have been very lucrative as he enjoyed great wealth. Upon Igor’s return from Kiev, his retinue observed that Sveinald was living in greater luxury than the princely court and encouraged the prince to take measures to increase his wealth so it would be greater than that of his commander. Motivated by these considerations, in 945 Prince Igor led his men against a Slavic tribe called the Drevlians to demand greater

tribute. His requests were duly granted and the seemingly satisfied Kievans duly departed and turned back to their capital.

On the return journey, Igor devised a plan to extract even more tribute from the Drevlians and turned back with a few men, allowing his main army to continue their journey to Kiev. When the Drevlians received news that Igor was on his way back, they consulted with Mal, their ruling prince. Prince Mal decided that they could no longer continue to appease Igor, since every time he would come back to demand more until the Drevlians had no more tribute to give. Taking advantage of the fact that Igor was without his army, they set upon his small retinue and captured him. They took him to their capital at the town of Iskorosten and executed him. According to a Byzantine source, “They had bent down two birch trees to the prince's feet and tied them to his legs; then they let the trees straighten again, thus tearing the prince's body apart.” Cruel forms of execution are often attested to in early sources, although most likely this description was inspired by artistic license. The name of the Drevlian tribe derives from the word *derevo* which means tree in the Slavic language.

Chapter 2 – The Christianization of Rus

Upon his death, Igor left behind a young son named Svyatoslav (945-72). The child was around three years old when he succeeded to his father's title of Grand Prince of Kiev. Igor's widow Olga was named regent for her young son, while Sveinald was appointed commander-in-chief. The Drevlians decided to use this opportunity to exploit the weakness of Kiev and to change their subordinate status as tributaries to Kiev. They planned to invite Olga to marry Prince Mal, informing her that he had been a good prince and was wronged by the capricious Igor. By doing so, they hoped to take control of the young Svyatoslav and ensure that he would be friendly to the Drevlians. With this plan in mind, they sent twenty respected men as emissaries to the Kievan court to meet Olga.

Olga received the dignitaries well and told them she was willing to marry their prince. She bade them to return to their boats for the night, telling them that she hoped to receive them officially in the presence of her subjects. She assured them that they would be carried in their boat through the city. The following morning, orders were given for the Drevlians be carried through the streets of Kiev in their boat as they had been promised. They assumed an air of pride and looked on disdainfully at the local population. In their triumph the ambassadors did not suspect that Olga prepared a ditch in front of her palace, into which they were deposited and buried alive. Olga knew that killing twenty men would not be sufficient to defeat her enemies. She therefore sent word to the Drevlians that if they were really serious about her marrying their prince, they must send all their distinguished men to escort her to Drevlian territory. When these men arrived, Olga invited them to the bathhouse and promised to meet them after they had bathed. Once the emissaries were inside, she gave the orders to lock the doors and burn down the wooden bathhouse, thus trapping the men amongst the flames.

Finally, Olga sent a message to the Drevlians that she was on her way, and ordered them to prepare large quantities of mead and honey. She arrived at Igor's tomb and expressed her desire to hold a funeral feast in his honor, inviting all the local dignitaries and ordering her followers to serve them. When the Drevlians were completely drunk, she ordered her men to slaughter them. Five thousand men were killed in the operation, and Olga requested further reinforcements to subdue her enemies completely. She led this force to the gates of Iskorosten and laid siege to the city. After a year of

campaigning, she was unable to capture the Drevlian capital. She realized that she could not take the city using traditional military means and devised yet another deception strategy. She signaled that she was prepared to abandon her siege if the Drevlians would pay tribute to Kiev. Offered honey and furs by the Drevlians, Olga informed them that she wished only to extract a small price – three sparrows and pigeons from each household. The Drevlians delivered the birds to Olga and returned to their homes, rejoicing that they were finally at peace. Olga ordered her men to attach small amounts of sulfur wrapped in cloth to the sparrows and pigeons. When they were set free, they returned to the city and duly set fire to their nests. The city was set ablaze and the inhabitants were massacred by Kievan soldiers as they escaped from the city.

Having successfully subdued the Drevlians and extinguished any prospect of further rebellion, Olga returned to Kiev and ruled over a peaceful realm. In 955 she embarked on a journey to Constantinople where she was met by the Emperor Constantine VII. The Emperor was impressed by her beauty and wisdom and wished to make her his empress. Olga replied that she was still pagan and would only agree to be baptized if the Emperor himself were to preside over the ceremony. She was duly baptized by the Patriarch and the Emperor and was happy to have joined the Christian faith. When Constantine proposed marriage, however, Olga answered that since he was her godfather, the proposed marriage was illegal under Christian law and she had no choice but to refuse his suit. The Emperor smiled and praised Olga for her wisdom, recognizing he had been outwitted. The Russian princess sailed back to Kiev with her ship laden with gifts from Constantine.

Upon her return to Kiev, Olga hoped to persuade her son and his subjects to convert to Christianity. Her efforts were in vain. Svyatoslav replied to his mother that conversion Christianity would encourage his warlike race to become meek and humble. Brought up by the great warrior Sveinald, Svyatoslav became a skilled fighter and had military ambitions. By the time he came of age, he was eager to go on campaign. Over the course of eight years between 964 and 972, Svyatoslav conducted a series of campaigns against a wide range of enemies. In 965 he successfully defeated the Khazars in battle and conquered the Khaganate of Khazaria. In 967, allied to the Byzantine Empire, he initiated a war against the First Bulgarian Empire and precipitated its collapse. In 968 he captured the strategic trading center of Pereyaslavets from the Bulgarians.

During Svyatoslav's absence from Kiev, the city was besieged by the Pechenegs, a nomadic Turkic tribe. Olga and Svyatoslav's young sons managed to escape the encirclement to join a small relieving force. Their presence raised a cheer in the camp that the Pechenegs lifted the siege under the impression that Svyatoslav had arrived. Once Kiev was safe, Svyatoslav received a letter from Kiev in which he was chastised by his mother for placing Kiev in danger. He duly returned to defeat the Pechenegs, but the following year he informed his subjects that he would relocate his capital to Pereyaslavets, leaving his eldest son Yaropolk to rule Kiev. The decision was unpopular and Olga begged Svyatoslav to reconsider, but he stuck to his decision. Olga died three days after Svyatoslav's departure to Pereyaslavets and was subsequently honored as the first Russian saint.

Svyatoslav's incredible victories incited jealousy among his Byzantine allies, who reneged on the alliance and attacked the Russians. In 971 they marched against Pereyaslavets with 100,000 men. Inside the city, Svyatoslav had only 10,000 men bearing arms. Nevertheless, the Russian prince commanded his men to fight or die, and the valiant soldiers managed to repel the attack and force the invaders to withdraw. Prince Svyatoslav then assumed the offensive and pursued the defeated enemy to Constantinople. As he approached the imperial capital, he was met by Greek emissaries who presented him with gold and silk. When the warrior prince refused these offerings, the envoys returned with a collection of weapons. Svyatoslav found these gifts more amenable and gave his thanks to the Emperor. Recognizing that Svyatoslav was a formidable warrior, the Byzantines begged him to go no further, but to accept tribute instead. Svyatoslav duly negotiated a favorable treaty with the Emperor and left Constantinople. On his return, he was ambushed by the Pechenegs, who were informed by the Greeks that Svyatoslav was return to Pereyaslavets with a small retinue. The nomads set upon him and killed him, turning his skull into a drinking vessel for their chieftain. Pereyaslavets was taken by the Greeks and the Russian court returned to Kiev.

Upon his death in 972, Svyatoslav left behind two legitimate sons; Yaropolk (972-80) in Kiev and Oleg, who ruled over the Drevlians in the town of Dereva. Svyatoslav's illegitimate son, Vladimir, was based in Novgorod. The two elder brothers fell out with each other and in 977 Yaropolk killed Oleg and seized his lands. Vladimir had sided with Oleg in the fratricidal conflict and decided to flee from Novgorod fearing for his own life. Over the course of the next two years Vladimir gathered supporters from his distant brethren

in Norway and in 980 embarked on a campaign against Yaropolk. Leading a large force of supporters and Varangian allies against Kiev, Vladimir forced his half-brother to capitulate. The unfortunate Yaropolk was later assassinated by Varangian mercenaries. Vladimir (980-1015), illegitimate and youngest son of Svyatoslav, thus emerged as Grand Prince of Kiev.

Like his father, Vladimir was a committed pagan and celebrated his victory by erecting idols of pagan gods both in Kiev and throughout his cities. Vladimir's uncle Dobrynya was sent to govern Novgorod, and built a large wooden totem depicting the thunder god Perun towering over the west bank of the Volkhov River. In the initial years of his reign, Vladimir followed his father's example and embarked on a series of successful military campaigns. In around 987, Vladimir is said to have received ambassadors from the Muslim Bulgars who sought to encourage him to adopt their faith. Enquiring about their lifestyle, the Muslims replied that they refrained from pork and wine. Vladimir was unable to accept these restrictions. "Drinking," said he, "is the joy of the Russians. We cannot exist without that pleasure." There followed German emissaries, who encouraged Vladimir to convert to Catholicism. The prince, realizing that he would have to submit to the authority of the Pope, rejected their religion. The Jewish Khazars came next, and described themselves as God's chosen people. Vladimir enquired of them that if this were the case, why they had been banished from their homeland and forced into exile. Finally, a Greek scholar came to Kiev and explained at length the Orthodox religion.

After receiving all the missionaries, Vladimir was inclined to convert to the Greek faith. However, he was hesitant to do so and his advisors cautioned him against accepting the Greeks at their word, since the Russians had suffered many times on the basis of Byzantine deceit. Vladimir therefore resolved to send his own ambassadors to visit the lands of the Muslims, Catholics, Jews, and Orthodox in turn and return with their observations. When they returned to Kiev, they reported to Vladimir and the leading nobles that they saw the Muslims praying in their mosques in silence, burying their heads to the ground. Their faith was solemn and joyless. They entered the Catholic churches, which were richly adorned but devoid of spirituality. "Then we went to Greece, and the Greeks led us to the edifices where they worship their God, and we knew not whether we were in heaven or on earth." Vladimir, who remembered that his grandmother Saint Olga had been an Orthodox Christian herself, thus resolved to convert his people to Orthodox

Christianity.

This is the tale of “the baptism of Rus” in 988 AD, as presented in the Primary Chronicle. While this is a popular version and provides an interesting insight into Russian stereotypes of foreign peoples and their religions, the actual circumstances of the conversion appear to have been encouraged by more prosaic factors such as military and strategic implications. At the end of the 10th century, the Russians and Greeks were seeking a closer relationship. Vladimir hoped to forge an alliance with the Byzantine Emperor Basil II by marrying his sister Anna. In order to marry the Greek princess Vladimir agreed to become a Christian and was baptized in the city of Kherson, a Greek city recently conquered from the Byzantine Empire. In the process, Vladimir sought to establish Christianity as his state religion and the Greeks sent Orthodox priests to evangelize the Russian people. As ruler of Rus both in name and in fact, Vladimir achieved what his grandmother attempted and failed. In the meantime, Vladimir ordered the pagan idols to be broken and churches to be built in their place, employing Greek artisans to build and decorate them.

Vladimir fell ill and died in 1015 and was canonized as Saint Vladimir. He had twelve children, some of whom predeceased him. He had hoped to leave his realm to his sons Boris and Gleb, whose mother was the Byzantine princess Anna Porphyrogenita, whom Vladimir had married after his conversion to Christianity. Both princes were away from Kiev when they heard of their father’s death. Meanwhile, political power in Kiev was seized by Svyatopolk (1015-19), Vladimir’s son from Yaropolk’s wife. Svyatopolk gathered his supporters and sought to seize the entire realm. Boris and Gleb were both murdered by Svyatopolk’s men, in the process becoming the first Christian martyrs in Russia. Meanwhile, Yaroslav, son of Vladimir’s first wife, heard that his brothers had been slain and vowed to confront Svyatopolk with an army of Novgorodians. A bitter civil war ensued, during which the city of Kiev changed hands three times. Eventually, Yaroslav emerged the victor and Svyatopolk died as he fled to Bohemia.

Chapter 3 – The Fragmentation and Subjugation of Rus

The reign of Yaroslav (1019-54) proved to be a golden age for Kievan Rus. Yaroslav was a learned man and surrounded himself with books, earning him the nickname Yaroslav the Wise. He wrote many texts on Christianity which were distributed among his people, continuing his father's efforts to enlighten his subjects. Grand Prince Yaroslav left behind a lasting material legacy in his cities. He had founded the city of Yaroslavl on the upper Volga while still a minor prince. He defeated the Chuds in the Baltic and founded the city of Yuryev, modern-day Tartu in Estonia. He built St. Sophia's Cathedral in Kiev, inspired by the Hagia Sophia Cathedral in Constantinople. The thirteen-domed cathedral became the royal mausoleum for the Kievan princes and remains one of the most popular tourist attractions in Kiev. He also built a great citadel in the city, of which only the so-called Golden Gate remains. The famous Pechersk Monastery of the Caves, inspired by the Greek monastery at Mount Athos, was also built during Yaroslav's reign.

When Yaroslav died in 1054, he instituted a law of succession for his sons and descendants. He sought to put an end to the fratricidal conflicts of his own and his father's generation. He stipulated that his eldest son would succeed him as Grand Prince of Kiev, while his other sons were sent to rule other key Russian principalities. When the eldest son died, he would not be succeeded by his son, but by his eldest surviving brother, usually the Prince of Novgorod. Only after the extinction of a generation of brothers would the throne pass to the next generation, with the condition that the descendants of minor princes who did not succeed to the Kievan throne were excluded from future succession. Through this system of lateral succession, Yaroslav hoped that brothers would no longer be compelled to fight against each other but would one day succeed to the Kievan throne provided they were still living.

Subsequent developments were to show that Yaroslav's remedy was worse than the illness he sought to cure. At the beginning, Yaroslav's sons Izyaslav (1054-73), Svyatoslav II (1073-77), and Vsevolod (1077-92) heeded their father's words and supported each other. They waged a campaign against their nephew Rostislav, whose father Vladimir had died in 1052, leaving him with no prospect of succession to his uncles' principalities. The princely triumvirate broke up in 1073 when Svyatoslav and Vsevolod turned against

their eldest brother and expelled him from Kiev. Thus, Yaroslav's succession laws did nothing to prevent conflicts between brothers, cousins, uncles and nephews who ruled over an increasingly fragmented collection of principalities under Kiev's nominal authority.

Over time these internecine conflicts among Russian princes led to the fragmentation of the Kievan state. While Kiev remained the political and spiritual center of the Russian lands and the title of Grand Prince of Kiev was still the ultimate prize, central authority in Kiev diminished and the Russian principalities had their own princes and political structures independent from the capital. Among the alternative political systems that emerged during this period of fragmentation was that of Novgorod. The city of Novgorod, which ranked second in prestige to Kiev among Russian cities, had enjoyed wide-ranging privileges since the days of Yaroslav. Unlike many other Russian cities, Novgorod had a wealthy and powerful merchant community and was a member of the Hanseatic League. As Kiev's authority weakened, the Novgorodians consolidated and strengthened their privileges both with regard to Kiev and to their own ruling prince. In 1136, the Novgorod Veche – a popular assembly – voted to overthrow Prince Vsevolod Mstislavich. They established the Republic of Novgorod in which the Veche was the supreme governing institution. Although there were still princes who ruled in Novgorod, their authority was dependent on what powers the Veche granted them. During the Novgorod Republic, the Prince of Novgorod was effectively a military leader with limited political authority. In order to emphasize that true sovereignty lay with the city and its people, Novgorodians often referred to their municipality as Lord Novgorod the Great.

Over time, some of these subordinate principalities absorbed their neighbors and increased their territorial scope. By the mid-1100s, the Principality of Vladimir-Suzdal became sufficiently powerful to challenge Kiev itself. The city of Vladimir appears to have been founded in 1108 by Prince Vladimir of Rostov-Suzdal, who would become Grand Prince Vladimir II Monomakh (1113-25). Monomakh's reign in Kiev, during which he passed a number of popular social reforms, was considered a golden age in the city before its eventual decline and fall, ironically at the hands of the city he founded. Incidentally, the Russian Primary Chronicle, one of the key historical sources for medieval Russia, was produced during the reign of Monomakh by Sylvester, Prior of St. Michael's Monastery in Kiev.

Monamakh's grandson Andrey Bogolyubsky (1157-1174) made Vladimir the capital of his principality, which was renamed Vladimir-Suzdal. As a mark of his ambition, he styled himself the Grand Prince of Vladimir-Suzdal. He was responsible for building the grand Cathedral of the Annunciation and the Cathedral of Saint Demetrius nearby in the city's citadel. He also ordered the construction of the Church of the Intercession on the Nerl several miles along the River Klyazma. This small perfectly-proportioned, single-domed church is usually considered to be the most beautiful of all Russian churches. In 1164 he petitioned the Orthodox Patriarch in Constantinople for the establishment of a metropolitan see in Vladimir to rival that of Kiev. The petition was unsuccessful, but in 1169 he led an army against Kiev and sacked the city. He forcibly transferred the metropolitan see in Kiev to his capital in Vladimir. By moving the spiritual center of Russia to Vladimir, Prince Andrey consolidated the city of Vladimir's position as the political center of the Russian state. The title of Grand Prince of Kiev continued to exist separately but it became less prestigious during the ascendency of the city of Vladimir.

Although Andrey Bogolyubsky was unable to maintain control over Kiev, the damage the city suffered in 1169 meant that it never recovered its former position. The new capital of Vladimir would remain the leading city in Rus for two centuries. Andrey's brother Vsevolod III (1177-1212) achieved considerable military successes against the principality of Ryazan, the main rival to Vladimir-Suzdal. During Vsevolod's reign, Vladimir enjoyed great prosperity and ruled over much of northeastern Rus. However, Vsevolod's death in 1212 destabilized the internal political situation. Vsevolod had fourteen children, which earned him the nickname Vsevolod the Big Nest. Yet such a big nest was a recipe for disaster and led to conflict amongst his sons. Vsevolod had disinherited his eldest son Konstantin and left his realm to his third son Yury, who became Yury II (1212-16; 1218-38) upon his father's death. Konstantin and Yury then fought a bitter civil war which ended with Konstantin's capture of Vladimir in 1216.

Although Yury II regained the throne in 1218 upon Konstantin's death that year, his reign was not a happy one. In 1223 the Mongols made their first foray into Russian territory and defeated a Kievan force under its Grand Prince Mstislav III, who was executed in the aftermath of the Battle of the Kalka River. Russia did not yet fall under Mongol subjugation as the invaders soon turned around and returned to Asia, but in 1237 they returned with a

vengeance. The invasion force under Batu Khan approached from the southeast and attacked Ryazan. The city's request for aid from Vladimir was not granted, since Yury regarded Ryazan as his principality's major rival. In December the city was captured by the Mongols, who then turned their attention to Vladimir itself, capturing the capital in February 1238. Yury retreated and gathered a new army, but this new force was soundly defeated by the Mongols and the Grand Prince was killed.

Over the next three years the Mongol armies swept across the Russian lands, sacking major cities on the way. A legendary tale tells of the city of Kitezh, which disappeared under the waters of Lake Svetolyar when the Mongol hordes approached. By 1240 the old capital of Kiev was captured. Only Pskov and Novgorod to the northwest avoided destruction by negotiating surrender. Thus, the Russian lands became part of the Mongol empire which stretched from the Pacific almost to the Baltic. With the death of Kublai Khan in 1294, the Mongol empire split into four major entities. The Russian portion was called the Golden Horde. The khans of the Golden Horde ruled Rus from their capital of Sarai located on the lower reaches of the Volga River, near modern-day Astrakhan. The Mongols abandoned their nomadic lifestyles and settled alongside the Tatars, a Turkic tribe which inhabited the southern steppes. Over time intermarriage between the Mongols and Tatars created a single race. Initially, the Golden Horde did not intervene much in 'internal affairs.' The Russian princes were allowed to fight each other just as they had done for more than two centuries. The Golden Horde expressed their authority in two main ways. Firstly, the Russian princes were obliged to pay tribute to the khan. Secondly, the Grand Prince of Vladimir had to travel to Sarai to receive a *yarlyk*, a document which authorized him to rule in the name of the khan.

In many ways, the threat of the Mongols in the east less important than the threats facing Rus from the west. The Novgorod First Chronicle states that in 1240 a Swedish army invaded Novgorod, seeking to take advantage of the crisis precipitated by the Mongol invasion and take control of Novgorod's trade networks. The twenty-year-old Prince Alexander Yaroslavich, grandson of Vsevolod the Big Nest, led a small army of Novgorodians to confront the Swedes, who had captured the mouth of the River Neva and were marching inland. Despite the numerical disparity, Alexander went on the offensive won an unlikely victory and repelled the unsuspecting invaders. For his efforts he was given the honorific name Nevsky, derived from the River Neva. Aside

from Russian sources, the evidence for the Battle of the Neva is limited, and it is more likely that it was a small border skirmish which assumed greater proportions. Nevertheless, this battle made the reputation of Alexander Nevsky, who would be celebrated as one of the greatest warrior princes in Russian history.

At the same time, the Teutonic Order – the crusader state which was based in the Baltic – invaded Pskov from the west. The invasion was part of an effort by the papacy to force Eastern Orthodox Christians to accept papal supremacy in Rome. Prince Alexander was keen to go to help Pskov, but was unable to do so. In 1241, Alexander successfully launched an offensive in order to retake Pskov from the Teutons and raided Crusader territory before retreating east. He was pursued by a force led by Bishop Hermann of Dorpat (Tartu), who pursued him across the frozen Lake Peipus (Lake Chudskoe in Russian). Alexander arranged his forces in a defensive formation with his cavalry on the flanks. The Teutonic knights attacked in a wedge formation, led by their formidable heavy cavalry. As his infantry cushioned the impact in the center, engaging in desperate hand-to-hand fighting, Alexander ordered his cavalry on both flanks to encircle the enemy, inflicting heavy losses on Hermann's army. Although tales of the Teutonic knights falling through cracks in the ice encumbered by their heavy armor were commonplace, this was most likely a later embellishment by the victors.

The terms Alexander imposed on Hermann were light and quickly accepted. At most the invaders lost 400 men, but the victory was celebrated as the greatest of Alexander's career, and one of the key episodes in Russian military history. Certainly, Alexander ensured that his western border would remain relatively peaceful. The Teutonic Order abandoned any further efforts to invade Rus. After eliminating the threat from the west, Alexander was obliged to turn his attention to the east. In 1246 his father Yaroslav died while returning from the Horde. It is likely that Yaroslav was poisoned by the khan, as execution by poison was one method by which the Horde could eliminate recalcitrant princes who were unwilling to pay tribute. Alexander adopted a policy of collaboration with the Horde while others, including his younger brother Andrey II (1249-52), attempted to rebel against Mongol rule. When Alexander became Grand Prince of Vladimir (1252-63), he continued his policy of collaboration, making several journeys to the khan to convince him of his loyalty. Meanwhile, he repopulated the cities of Vladimir and Suzdal, which were still recovering from the destruction a generation earlier.

Alexander died in 1263 and would later be canonized by the Orthodox Church as Saint Alexander Nevsky, the great warrior prince who protected Orthodox Christianity from infidels both east and west.

Chapter 4 – The Rise of Muscovy

When Alexander died, he divided his patrimony between his four sons. The eldest, Vasily, received Novgorod. Dmitry received Pereslavl (a city located 140km southwest of Yaroslavl), where Alexander himself had been born. The third son Andrey was given Gorodets on the Volga, while the youngest, Daniil, became Prince of Moscow. Vasily died in 1271 before he had the opportunity to become Grand Prince of Vladimir, but Dmitry (1277-81; 1283-93) and Andrey III (1281-83; 1293-1304) fought each other for the title. Daniil of Moscow, Andrey's heir, stayed largely neutral amidst his warring siblings and over the course of his reign slowly expanded the territory and population of his relatively poor principality. By the beginning of the fourteenth century, Daniil, now a powerful prince in his own right, was poised to assume the highest title of Grand Prince, but predeceased his brother Andrey by a year in 1303. The Muscovite prince's early death would have major repercussions for the future development of the Russian state.

Daniil was two years old when his father died and made him the first Prince of Moscow, since the city had previously been a minor possession of Vladimir-Suzdal. Moscow first appears on the historical record in 1147 and its founder is said to have been Yury Dolgoruky, the grandson of Yaroslav the Wise, who built the settlement as a strategic outpost on the Moskva River. The city did not escape destruction during the Mongol invasion but recovered over time. The city's central position among the Russian lands protected it from more devastating invasions and attracted refugees from other principalities who sought a more peaceful existence. Although Moscow had risen in status to become a principality under Prince Daniil, it was much poorer than the inheritance enjoyed by his elder brothers. Nevertheless, he was a wise and pious ruler who was much respected by his subjects, and he managed to avoid being involved in his brothers' conflicts. In 1282 he established the first monastery in Moscow, the Danilov Monastery, located at a site around five miles to the south of the kremlin. The monastery continues to be active to the present day and a statue of Prince Daniil stands nearby, erected in 1997 upon the 850th anniversary of the city of Moscow.

Daniil transformed Moscow from a backwater to a powerful principality. In 1302, a year before his death, he inherited the principality of Pereslavl from a

childless nephew. However, his death at the age of 42 in 1303 prevented his sons from becoming Grand Prince of Vladimir. When Andrey III died in 1304, the grand princely throne of Vladimir was passed to Mikhail of Tver (1304-18), a nephew of Alexander Nevsky. Mikhail's succession was almost immediately challenged by Prince Yury Danilovich of Moscow, Daniil's eldest son. Yury's actions precipitated a civil war between Moscow and Tver for supremacy among the Russian principalities. This struggle would last more than a quarter century and it was unclear which party would emerge victorious. In the initial stages, Tver enjoyed the upper hand. The city was well fortified and protected by two rivers, the Tvertsa and the Volga, which also facilitated the city's trade. Most importantly, Mikhail was the incumbent and legitimate Grand Prince of Vladimir. The rebel Prince of Moscow was challenging the ruler chosen by the traditional method of succession, and who received his right to rule from the khan.

Yury recognized he was the clear underdog and spent the first decade of his reign in Moscow strengthening his power, conquering Kolomna from neighboring Ryazan, as well as Mozhaisk from the princes of Smolensk. By 1314 he secured the backing of Metropolitan Peter, the head of the Russian Church, and formed an alliance with Novgorod. In 1315 Yury set forth on a journey to Sarai in order to persuade the khan to grant him the yarlyk to become Grand Prince of Vladimir. He stayed at the court of Uzbeg Khan, recently elevated to the supreme office, and over the course of two years engaged in diplomatic negotiations to win the khan's support. Yury was successful in his venture and his alliance with Uzbeg was sealed by his marriage to the khan's sister. Uzbeg Khan formally dismissed Mikhail and appointed Yury to the throne of Vladimir. Mikhail did not accept his dismissal and continued to resist. Despite facing a sizeable allied Muscovite-Tatar force commanded by Yury, Mikhail emerged victorious in battle. Yury fled to Novgorod, but his Tatar wife was captured by the enemy. She soon died in Tverite captivity under mysterious circumstances, causing Yury to claim that she had been poisoned by Mikhail. The khan summoned both warring princes to Sarai to present their cases, eventually ruling that Mikhail was guilty and ordered his execution. Thus, Yury of Moscow became Grand Prince Yury III of Vladimir (1318-22).

The struggle with Tver did not end with the execution of Mikhail at the hands of the khan. Yury's expansionist policies made him an unpopular figure and a target for many rival princes. He had also effectively made himself the khan's

tax collector, sending his Muscovite armies to collect tribute for the Golden Horde. Mikhail's sons Dmitry and Alexander continued the struggle and in 1322, Dmitry went to Sarai and persuaded the khan that Yury was siphoning away tribute intended for the Horde. He thus reclaimed the yarlyk and became Grand Prince Dmitry (1322-26). Yury was summoned to Sarai to stand trial for his supposed misdeeds but refused, fully aware that it would likely end in his own execution. Despite these attempts to avoid punishment, in 1325 he was assassinated on Dmitry's orders. Dmitry himself was executed at Sarai several months later for ordering Yury's extra-judicial murder. He was succeeded as Grand Prince by his brother, Alexander of Tver (1326-27).

Yury's younger brother, Ivan Danilovich, continued his brother's policy when he became Prince Ivan of Moscow. He took advantage of a series of altercations between Tatar officials and the princely court in Vladimir which resulted in the lynching of the officials by a mob. Ivan immediately set out to the Horde and persuaded Uzbeg Khan to grant him the yarlyk. The khan was sympathetic to Ivan's cause and sent him 50,000 men to punish Tver. Alexander fled to Novgorod, and then Pskov, where he was welcomed as their prince. Once Alexander found sanctuary in Pskov, the civil war in the Russian lands assumed greater proportions. Faced with a declaration of war from the Golden Horde and most of the Russian princes under the leadership of Moscow, Alexander sought protection from Grand Duke Gediminas of Lithuania. Gediminas had initiated an era of eastward expansion and over the course of his reign (1315-41) conquered major Slavic cities such as Kiev and Smolensk. This was a pivotal moment in the political development of Eastern Europe. Previously the Slavic principalities had been nominally united under the rule of Kiev, and then Vladimir. Lithuania became the largest country in Europe, and its expansion partitioned old Rus between the Golden Horde and Lithuania. In his official Latin title Gediminas styled himself as "King of the Lithuanians and many Russians." Ivan of Moscow (1331-40) may have assumed the supreme title of Grand Prince of Vladimir, but he no longer ruled over the entirety of the Kievan inheritance. Ivan's successors would spend several centuries attempting to take control of all Rus.

Ivan realized that loyalty towards the Golden Horde would best further the interests of his Muscovite state. This policy earned him the nickname "Ivan *Kalita*," meaning "Ivan Moneybags." The khan depended on Ivan and his armies to extract tribute from the other principalities. If the other cities were

unable to pay tribute, Ivan used Moscow's wealth to offer them loans, knowing that they would not be paid back. As Moscow's neighboring cities sank further into debt, Ivan sent his armies on punitive expeditions to annex them and enlarge the territory of Muscovy. There are claims that this ruthless policy carried out by Moscow during Ivan's reign inspired the phrase 'Moscow does not believe in tears,' indicating that Ivan's men would stop at nothing to get their hands on the wealth of other cities. The phrase became a common maxim about the city and was the title of an Oscar-winning Soviet film released in 1980.

More than anyone else, Ivan was responsible for the rise of Moscow as the most important city in Rus. He used a portion of his increasing wealth to finance building works in the city. In 1325 he persuaded the Metropolitan Peter to move his see from Vladimir to Moscow, thus establishing Moscow as the religious center of Rus. Moscow was soon made the capital of the principality of Vladimir-Suzdal, even though the title of Grand Prince of Vladimir was temporarily held by a cousin, Alexander of Suzdal (1328-31). In 1326 Ivan built the Cathedral of the Dormition inside the Moscow Kremlin, which would become the most important church in Russian Orthodoxy. In 1333 he built the Cathedral of the Archangel Michael nearby. When Ivan died in 1340, he was buried in this new cathedral, which would serve as the royal mausoleum for Muscovite princes for almost four hundred years. Most importantly, before his death Ivan persuaded the khan to make the succession to the grand princely throne hereditary. This overturned Yaroslav the Wise's succession law which had been in place for three centuries, and ensured that the Grand Prince of Moscow could consolidate his possessions with the knowledge that his sons would inherit his throne.

The change in the succession law paved the road for the centralization of power in Moscow. This process continued under Ivan's sons, Semyon (1340-53) and Ivan II (1353-59), although neither achieved the success of their father. Meanwhile, Moscow continued to be engaged in conflict with Tver. In 1368 Prince Mikhail II, son of Prince Alexander (of Tver, later Pskov), formed an alliance with Lithuania in an effort to reclaim hegemony over the Russian principalities from Moscow. The Muscovite prince, Dmitry Ivanovich (1359-89), a grandson of Ivan Kalita, strengthened the walls of the Moscow Kremlin in anticipation of an enemy assault. During the war Grand Duke Algirdas of Lithuania twice attempted to capture Moscow, but Dmitry's fortifications proved impregnable. Prince Dmitry signed a peace with

Lithuania in 1372, and in 1375 he made a favorable treaty with Prince Mikhail, in which Moscow's hegemony over Rus was recognized by the latter. By this stage, Moscow's dominance was recognized by all of the Russian principalities. This display of unity came just in time as Dmitry prepared for a showdown against the Golden Horde.

Chapter 5 – Overthrowing the Tatar yoke

Over the course of Grand Prince Dmitry's reign, the political integrity of the Golden Horde collapsed as princes and warlords fought each other for the title of Great Khan. In the late 1370s, Dmitry seized this opportunity to challenge the authority of the Horde by withholding tribute to the Khan. Dmitry's actions outraged the Tatar commander-in-chief Mamai, who emerged as the leading political figure in the Horde during this period. In 1378 he dispatched an army of 50,000 against the Grand Duchy of Moscow. This army, commanded by Murza Begich, was confronted by Dmitry at the Vozha River. The Muscovite prince decided to fight a defensive battle and stationed his army on high ground. Dmitry and his Muscovite troops occupied the center of a bow-shaped formation, while the flanks were occupied by troops from allied Russian principalities. The Tatars eventually made their move and sought to encircle the Russians on both flanks with their cavalry. However, the Russian infantry provided fierce resistance and the horsemen were unable to successfully execute the maneuver. Dmitry then ordered his men to counter-attack the enemy, whose horsemen were in a state of disorder. Virtually the entire Tatar army was annihilated and its commander killed.

The victory over the Tatars at the Battle of the River Vozha was the first significant defeat inflicted on the Horde by Russian armies. The battle proved to be of great symbolic effect, since it demonstrated that the Golden Horde and its army was no longer the invincible war machine it had been in its early days. The defeat further infuriated Mamai, who in 1380 personally led an army against Moscow despite facing domestic challenges to his authority by rival khans. When Dmitry received news that Mamai was heading to Moscow, he issued a call to arms throughout the Russian principalities and gathered an army at the fortress town of Kolomna, some seventy miles to the southeast of Moscow. On the face of it, Dmitry was a serious underdog. Mamai concluded an alliance with Prince Jogaila of Lithuania who sent a significant force against Moscow. He also had the support of Prince Oleg of Ryazan. Despite the support of the majority of Russian principalities, Dmitry was vastly outnumbered by Mamai's Tatar forces alone. Nevertheless, he decided that his best chance of success was to outmaneuver his enemies and confront Mamai's force on its own. This entailed marching south and crossing the Don River, closing off lines of retreat and condemning his army

to destruction if it were to suffer defeat at the hands of the enemy.

The two sides met each other at Kulikovo Field in early September 1380. Early sources provide limited information about the battle and traditional histories of the battle are based on sixteenth century sources which are undoubtedly significantly embellished to establish a grander narrative. According to legend, the battle began with a contest between two champions nominated by each side. As they clashed, their lances ran through the other and both were killed. The two sides then began skirmishing with each other before the main forces clashed. The Tatars and Russians thus came to be entangled in a ferocious melee for several hours as the dead from both sides piled up on top of each other. Dmitry himself was in the thick of the fighting on the front line. He exchanged his armor for that of one of his retinue so he would not be targeted. This did not prevent him from being heavily wounded, while several of his commanders were killed. The Russian line buckled under pressure from the Tatars and was in the process of breaking when Dmitry ordered his reserve, hidden under the cover of an oak forest, into the fray. This changed the course of the battle and the Tatars were soon put to flight. At the moment of victory, Dmitry fainted from loss of blood but survived. He was given the honorific surname Donskoy for his heroic victory. Like his ancestor Alexander Nevsky, Dmitry Donskoy is celebrated as one of Russia's greatest warrior princes.

Dmitry's victory at Kulikovo has become one of the most famous episodes of Russian history. Despite the resounding success of the Russian armies at Kulikovo, the battle did not immediately result in Muscovy's overthrow of the Tatar yoke. The defeated Mamai's authority was significantly weakened and he was soon removed from power and killed by Khan Tokhtamysh, who established himself as Great Khan and reunited the lands of the Golden Horde. In 1382 he embarked on a campaign against Dmitry in an effort to achieve what Mamai had failed to on two previous occasions – the resurgence of Tatar suzerainty over Rus. For the third time in four years, Tatar horsemen galloped across the southern Russian steppes, leaving a trail of destruction behind them, with Moscow as their target. This time, they were more successful and laid siege to Moscow. Although the Muscovite garrison managed to parry the threat through the use of firearms (the first time they had been employed by Russians), Tokhtamysh's Russian allies persuaded the Muscovites to open the gates and promised that the city would be left unharmed. These promises were not honored and the Tatars burned down the

city and killed 25,000 people. The sack of Moscow allowed Tokhtamysh to achieve his goal of restoring the authority of the Golden Horde over Rus, as Dmitry agreed to pay tribute as before. Despite the restoration of the status quo, Dmitry's earlier victories set a foundation for his successors to build on as the Golden Horde continued its decline.

When Dmitry died in 1389, his throne was passed to his son Vasily I (1389-1425). Vasily was the first Muscovite prince to inherit his father's titles without the need for the khan's approval. During the initial years of Vasily's reign, the Golden Horde was thrown into political turmoil again as Tokhtamysh turned against his former ally Tamerlane. Tamerlane launched a campaign against the Golden Horde with the intention of restoring the Mongol Empire as it had been under Genghis Khan. In 1395, Tamerlane's armies caused great destruction in the Volga region, sacking cities such as Astrakhan and Azov and weakening Tokhtamysh's authority. Vasily took advantage of these events and released himself from his tribute-paying obligations, ruling as an independent sovereign. In 1399 Tamerlane defeated Tokhtamysh and made his general Edigu the khan of the Golden Horde. After Tamerlane's death in 1405, Edigu launched a series of campaigns against Muscovy. While he failed to capture Moscow, his forces managed to burn parts of the city. By 1412 Vasily was obliged to once again become a vassal of the Golden Horde.

The struggle between Tokhtamysh and Tamerlane during the turn of the 15th century fatally weakened the Golden Horde. Over the course of the 15th century, competing Tatar princes established their own independent dominions, leading to a fragmentation of the Golden Horde. These new entities included the Khanate of Kazan, the Khanate of Crimea, the Khanate of Astrakhan, the Nogai Horde. The remnants of the Golden Horde, which maintained control of the steppe between the Caspian and Black seas, including the capital of Sarai, renamed itself the Great Horde in 1466. The Horde was significantly weakened by the strengthening power not only of the Grand Principality of Moscow, but also the Kingdom of Poland-Lithuania which extended its territories towards the Black Sea. The fragmentation of the Horde did not eliminate the Tatar threat to Muscovy, which was itself engaged in a bitter civil war during the reign of Vasily II (1425-62). In 1439 Grand Prince Vasily was forced to flee from Moscow when it was besieged by Ulugh Muhammad, the ruler of the Kazan Khanate. In 1445 Vasily went on campaign against Kazan but was defeated and captured. The Russians

were obliged to pay a large ransom for their Grand Prince.

It was not until the reign of Vasily's son Ivan III (1462-1505) that Muscovy successfully ended its tributary relationship with the Horde. As a young man Ivan fought in his father's campaigns against the Tatar khanates. In 1476, Ivan, as many of his predecessors had done previously, decided to withhold tribute intended for the Horde. Once again, this provoked a Tatar campaign against Muscovy in order to punish the Grand Prince for his insolence. Ahmed Khan launched his campaign in 1480, allied with the Polish king Casimir IV. The Tatar and Muscovite forces confronted each other across the Ugra River, in the same way that Dmitry Donskoy had confronted Mamai across the Don a century earlier. Unlike his illustrious ancestor, Ivan took the cautious approach and did not cross the river. An attempt by the Tatar army to cross the river was rebuffed by the firearms of the Muscovite army, but Ivan did not go on the offensive. For several weeks in October both sides continued facing each other, exchanging shouts and insults, while awaiting reinforcements. By the end of October and the onset of winter, both sides withdrew their forces. In Moscow the withdrawal of the Tatar army was considered a great victory despite the absence of hostilities and the event is known to history as The Great Stand on the Ugra River. The Great Stand came to be seen as the moment when Muscovy had conclusively thrown off the Tatar yoke. However, it is perhaps more appropriate to regard it as a key milestone in a long process during which the Russians strengthened their power at the expense of the Tatars.

The Great Horde was finally eliminated in 1502, although the separate khanates remained in existence for several decades. The Crimean Khanate survived until the end of the 18th century. The collapse of the Golden Horde ended more than two centuries of Mongol-Tatar rule over much of Rus. The so-called Mongol yoke over Rus was far lighter than medieval chroniclers would have us believe. The Grand Princes were given significant political and religious autonomy and it was only when they withheld tribute that the khan launched campaigns of retribution. Nevertheless, two centuries of Mongol rule did have a significant impact on the trajectory of Russian history. At a geopolitical level, the Kievan state of Vladimir and Yaroslav was divided between Poland-Lithuania in the west and Muscovy in the east. This resulted in centuries of conflict between Russia and Poland for control over Rus. Mongol rule over Rus also precipitated the centralization of political authority, not in Sarai but rather in Moscow. The transformation of

Moscow from remote backwater to the capital of medieval Rus was the result of Moscow's policy of accommodation and obeisance to the Mongol khan. The military power and wealth which was concentrated in Moscow as a result of the policy allowed her princes to subdue rival principalities over the course of the 14th and 15th centuries.

Chapter 6 – Gathering the Russian Lands

During his 43-year reign, Ivan III not only succeeded in securing the independence of the Russian principalities under Tatar rule, but also in extending Muscovite territory at the expense of the other principalities. The process of consolidating Slavic lands under Moscow's control came to be known as the "Gathering of the Russian lands." As described in an earlier chapter, this process was initiated by Ivan Kalita in the first half of the 14th century and continued under his successors. Despite Moscow's territorial expansion and its status as the leading city among the Slavic lands, states such as Tver, Novgorod, and independent Lithuania retained great wealth and resources and took opportunities to challenge Moscow when the latter was engulfed by succession crises. Ivan III's father, Grand Prince Vasily II, spent much of his reign confronting a challenge to his throne by his uncle, Yury of Zvenigorod, who ruled the Principality of Galich, an important commercial center on the upper Volga. In the process of these wars Vasily was captured by his enemies in 1446 and blinded, subsequently acquiring the nickname Vasily the Dark.

Despite this major setback, Vasily eventually secured victory over his cousins by the 1450s. Due to his blindness, his son and heir Ivan played an active role in political and military affairs and became co-tsar at the end of the decade. Almost immediately upon his accession to the Muscovite throne in 1462 Ivan embarked on a campaign to annex subordinate principalities to the Grand Principality of Moscow. In 1463 he annexed Yaroslavl to his territories, and in 1474 he purchased the lands of the Principality of Rostov. These principalities, although centered on ancient cities, were no longer in a position to rival Moscow. The most important obstacles to Ivan's policy of conquest were the Republic of Novgorod and the Principality of Tver. In 1471 Ivan invaded Novgorod at the head of a Muscovite army, fearful that Novgorod was falling under the influence of Lithuania. The Muscovites defeated a force of 30,000 men and reduced the proud Republic of Novgorod to a puppet state, formally annexing the republic to Moscow in 1478. The proud Novgorodians were unwilling to accept this fate, obliging Ivan order three purges of the city in a decade. The proud city of Novgorod would never recover from Ivan III's brutal policies, though worse was to come.

In 1485 Ivan defeated Prince Mikhail Borisovich of Tver and incorporated his lands into his ever-growing principality. After absorbing the territories of

Moscow's rivals and declaring independence from the Tatars, Ivan assumed the new title of "Grand Prince of All Rus," laying claim to the entire legacy of Kievan Rus. Ivan's consolidation of the Russian territories was not the only reason for Moscow's elevated political and religious importance. In 1453 the Byzantine Empire collapsed and its capital was captured by the Ottomans, Islamic conquerors from central Turkey. This event caused shockwaves through European Christendom and led to fears that the Ottomans would overrun Europe. While the Ottoman Empire only reached as far as Hungary at its greatest extent, it made Constantinople its capital and would continue to rule over that city until the empire's collapse following the First World War. Orthodox Christians in Eastern Europe previously looked to the Patriarch in Constantinople for spiritual guidance. With Constantinople having fallen to the Turks, Moscow remained the most important center for Orthodox Christianity. The monk Filofey of Pskov conceived of Moscow as the successor to Rome. The two previous centers of Orthodox religion, Rome and Constantinople, had fallen to Latin Catholics and Muslims respectively. It was up to Moscow to remain as a bastion of Orthodox Christianity as the Third Rome. While this doctrine was initially conceived in spiritual terms, it would later have political implications. In 1472 following the death of his first wife, Ivan married the Byzantine princess Sophia Palaeologina, the niece of Constantine VII, the last Byzantine emperor. This enabled Moscow to lay dynastic claim to the legacy of the Byzantine Empire.

In order to underline the greatness of his realm, Ivan III initiated an ambitious construction program in his capital city of Moscow. The present-day profile of the Moscow Kremlin dates from the reign of Ivan III. Despite Ivan's wars against Lithuania and his opposition to Roman Catholicism, Ivan cultivated cultural relations with western Europe and hired several Italian Renaissance architects to remodel the Kremlin. In 1475, the Bolognese architect and engineer Aristotele Fioravanti was hired to rebuild the Dormition Cathedral after a previous effort to rebuild the structure was halted after an earthquake. Italians were also asked to work on rebuilding the Annunciation and Archangel Cathedrals over the following decades. During the 1480s, Pietro Antonio Solari and Marco Ruffo remodeled the Kremlin walls, building the distinctive towers that are well-known to visitors to Moscow. Inside the complex the two men collaborated on the Palace of Facets, named after the distinctive rows of diamond-shaped stones that decorate the palace's façade. The palace is the oldest secular structure in the Moscow Kremlin and is now

used as a ceremonial hall for the President of Russia.

Ivan III died in 1505 with construction work unfinished. His son and successor Vasily III (1505-33) supervised the completion of the Archangel Cathedral and the Bell Tower of St. John, which was later renamed the Ivan the Great Bell Tower in honor of Ivan III, who was accorded the honorific Ivan the Great during his son's reign. Ivan left to his son a realm three times larger than the one he had inherited 43 years earlier. Vasily continued his father's policies and further extended the territory of Muscovy by annexing the remaining autonomous principalities including Pskov and Ryazan. He also successfully captured the fortress of Smolensk from Lithuania. A descendant of Byzantine emperors through the maternal line, Vasily was the first Russian ruler to officially adopt the Byzantine state emblem of the double-headed eagle. The two heads of the eagle represent imperial dominion over east and west and now serves as the state emblem of the Russian Federation.

When Vasily died he left behind two infant sons, Ivan and Yury. The three-year-old Ivan IV (1533-84) was crowned Grand Prince of Moscow, but political power passed to a council of *boyars* (leading noblemen), who fought each other for political influence. Later in his life, Ivan complained of ill-treatment from the boyars, who were busily fighting amongst themselves and neglected their young princes. The struggle for influence may have been encouraged by the belief that Ivan was a sickly child and was not expected to survive for long, while Yury was deaf and could not be expected to be an effective ruler. Nevertheless, when Ivan reached his majority in 1547, he was crowned "Tsar of All the Russias." This new title was a sign of Moscow's confidence in the international stage. The title *Tsar*, derived from Caesar, had been used in medieval Rus to refer to both the Byzantine Emperor and the Tatar Khan. (The title for the Tsar's wife was *Tsaritsa*, for sons *Tsarevich*, and daughters *Tsarevna*.) While the title had been used in correspondence by Ivan's father and grandfather, Ivan was the first Russian monarch to be crowned as tsar. Through his coronation and assumption of this new title, Ivan IV was laying claim to the legacies of both Byzantium and the Golden Horde.

Once he came to the throne and was able to rule in his own right, Ivan proved to be an ambitious ruler in both domestic and foreign policy. Soon after his accession he established the *Zemsky Sobor* or Assembly of the Land, an assembly of representatives from three estates: the nobility, the clergy, and

the commoners. The body deliberated over a *Sudebnik*, or law code, which was adopted in 1550. The Sudebnik of 1550 was a revision of Ivan the Great's law code dating from 1497, which provided for the centralization of the Russian state by codifying and rationalizing existing legal traditions and extending their authority across the realm. The Sudebnik of 1550 was inspired by Ivan's egalitarian desires, reducing the political power of the aristocratic class which had sidelined him during his youth. Ivan won the support of the common people, who hailed him as a wise and just ruler who prevented aristocratic elites from escaping legal punishments. Ivan's reputation as a champion of the people appears to have been a constant feature of his long reign.

With regard to foreign policy, Ivan first turned his attention to the east. During the early years of his reign, Russia was subjected to frequent raids by the Kazan Khanate. In 1547 Ivan launched a campaign against Kazan but failed to take the city. In order to increase Russia's military capabilities, he established a force of professional soldiers known as *streltsy* or musketeers. In 1551 the Tsar prepared for a second campaign against Kazan. He ordered the construction of a wooden fortress which was floated down the Volga River to Sviyazhsk, some thirty kilometers to the west of Kazan. This fortress would serve as his base of military operations as he led 150,000 men towards Kazan in 1552, laying siege to the city at the end of August. The siege operations were supervised by General Alexander Gorbaty-Shuisky, a young and talented general who was an effective commander. Although the walls of the Kazan Kremlin were formidable, Ivan's army was equipped with siege machines which were operated by Italian siege engineers. By 2 October, Kazan's citadel fell to the Russians, who proceeded to sack the city and massacre its inhabitants. Ivan followed his conquest of Kazan in 1552 with the conquest of Astrakhan in 1556, establishing Russian control of the Volga River. Following his victory over Kazan, Ivan ordered the construction of what is perhaps the most famous landmark in the whole of Russia. St. Basil's Cathedral is situated at the southern end of Red Square. The cathedral consists of nine separate churches, each topped by a colorful dome. The cathedral's official name is the Cathedral of the Intercession. Its popular name derives from St. Basil the Blessed, a holy fool and contemporary of Ivan who was canonized after his death and whose relics are held inside the cathedral.

After Ivan's defeat of Kazan and Astrakhan, Russian political authority began

to extend further east. In 1558 Ivan granted a patent to the Stroganov family to colonize Siberia. As wealthy salt merchants, the Stroganovs sought to exploit the commercial potential of the vast expanses that lay to the east of Muscovy. They built forts in order to protect their lands, which were under constant threat from the Khanate of Siberia. In the 1570s they began to hire Cossack mercenaries to defend their estates, who chose Yermak Timofeyevich as their leader. In 1582 Yermak managed to overthrow the Siberian Khanate and capture its capital. Yermak requested reinforcements from Tsar Ivan to consolidate the conquests. When Ivan sent a force of streltsy to Siberia, he claimed the territory for the crown, dispossessing the Stroganovs, and assumed the title of Tsar of Siberia. Yermak was killed in an ambush in 1585, but his legacy of expansion into Siberia was consolidated by Ivan and his successors.

Over the course of his reign Tsar Ivan looked west as well as east. In 1558 he launched a campaign in the Baltic in an effort to establish a foothold on the Baltic Sea, initiating the Livonian War which lasted a quarter century. Although Ivan enjoyed initial successes against the Livonian Confederation – the remnants of the Teutonic Order which had been defeated by Alexander Nevsky three centuries earlier – he was soon opposed by Poland-Lithuania, Sweden, and Denmark. In 1564, Ivan's close friend and advisor Andrey Kurbsky defected to the Lithuanians and participated in military operations in Russia. Kurbsky's defection was a major psychological blow for Ivan, who suspected that other boyars would follow suit. In December 1564 he left Moscow and decamped to the village of Alexandrovskaya Sloboda without leaving instructions for the government and refusing to respond to any communication from the capital. When a delegation sent from Moscow begged the Tsar to return, Ivan said that the realm was full of traitors and he would only return to the throne if he could be given extra-judicial powers to eliminate them. Ivan's request was granted and he returned to Moscow in early 1565. He duly established the *oprichnina*, a vast region of northwest Russia where Ivan exercised personal rule, supported by enforcers known as *oprichniki*. The policy was notorious for its brutality, but Ivan's actions may be justified by an effort to establish autocratic power and eliminate aristocratic privilege, enforcing the social equality which he legislated for during the early days of his reign. The most notorious atrocity committed by the oprichniki took place in 1570 when Ivan ordered the massacre of thousands of people in Novgorod. The Crimean Tatars took advantage of the

political turmoil to launch raids into Russia, and in 1571 set fire to Moscow. In 1572 a 120,000 strong Tatar army marched towards Moscow, but it was defeated by a regular army under the command of Prince Mikhail Vorotynsky at the Battle of Molodi. Ivan soon abolished the oprichnina.

Tsar Ivan IV ended his life a bitter old man, dying in 1584 at the age of 54. Although he had achieved great successes in the east, his efforts to expand his territories westward ended in failure. From 1578, the dynamic King of Poland Stefan Batory launched a series of successful campaigns to conquer the Russian cities of Polotsk and Velikiye Luki. The Russian Tsar, defeated and isolated, made overtures to Queen Elizabeth I of England for an alliance against Catholic Poland, even proposing marriage to the English sovereign. English assistance was not forthcoming and in 1583 Ivan was forced to sign a peace treaty which resulted in the loss of territory to Poland. Although Ivan is known in the English-speaking world as Ivan the Terrible, and the oprichnina appears to confirm this ruthless reputation, the Russian term *Grozny* used to describe Ivan does not carry such negative connotations. It is more accurate to refer to the first Russian tsar as Ivan the Fearsome or Ivan the Formidable. From the moment he assumed the title of tsar at the age of sixteen in 1547, Ivan never ceased to cultivate his image as a formidable ruler.

Part 2 – Imperial Russia

Chapter 7 – The Birth of a Dynasty

As he entered the twilight of his reign, Tsar Ivan nurtured his eldest surviving son Tsarevich Ivan Ivanovich as his successor. During the latter stages of the Livonian War, the relationship between father and son had deteriorated as the young Ivan criticized his father's military strategy. On a November evening in 1581, the Tsar came across his son's pregnant wife wearing immodest clothing and physically scolded her. The Tsarevich leaped to his wife's defense and denounced his father's violence. The Tsar brought up the issue of his son's insubordination during the war and labeled him a traitor. The two men grappled with each other and senior officials rushed to separate father and son. During the confrontation the Tsar struck at his son with his staff, causing the Tsarevich a severe head injury. In an instant the Tsar realized what he had done and cradled the bloodied head of his dying son in his arms. The Tsarevich lingered for several days, but Tsar Ivan's prayers for his recovery were in vain. Although some historians do not believe the Tsar struck the fatal blow, it is the most widely accepted version of Tsarevich Ivan's death.

The unfortunate death of Tsarevich Ivan brought Russia to the brink of a succession crisis following the death of Ivan the Terrible in 1584. Since Ivan and his predecessors had eliminated and dispossessed potential rivals, there were no legally recognized claimants to the throne aside from Ivan's two remaining sons, Fyodor and Dmitry. The 29-year-old Fyodor succeeded to the throne as Tsar Fyodor I (1584-98) but was mentally disabled and did not take much of an interest in political issues. He was a pious Christian and spent much of his time bell-ringing. Tsarevich Dmitry, Ivan's other son, was only two years old when his father died. Moreover, Dmitry had been born to Maria Nagaya, Ivan the Terrible's seventh wife. Under Russian Orthodox law, only the first three wives were officially recognized and therefore Dmitry was widely considered to be illegitimate and excluded from the succession. Consequently, if Fyodor were to die without a son, the Rurikid dynasty which had ruled Rus since the days of Rurik would be extinguished.

The uncertainty over the succession created the opportunity for ambitious boyars to lay claim to the succession in the event of the Tsar's death. During Fyodor's reign, Boris Godunov established himself as the man who held power behind the throne. Godunov had been a leading advisor during the reign of Ivan the Terrible and his sister Irina was married to Fyodor. As the

Tsar's brother-in-law, Godunov was setting himself up as the most suitable candidate for the succession. Godunov's path to power was made easier after the mysterious death of Tsarevich Dmitry in 1591. Dmitry and his mother had been sent to the distant Volga town of Uglich in 1584 upon Fyodor's accession to the throne. Godunov claimed the young Dmitry was sent away for his safety, far from the political intrigue in Moscow. Of course, keeping Dmitry far from Moscow strengthened Godunov's own position as a potential successor to Fyodor. In 1591 the nine-year-old Dmitry was found dead with his throat cut. Godunov sent a delegation led by the boyar Vasily Shuisky to investigate the incident. Shuisky reported that the young Tsarevich had been playing a popular childhood game involving a knife, and had an epileptic fit while pointing the knife at himself. Opponents of Godunov cast doubt on these conclusions. In his play *Boris Godunov* dating from 1836, Russia's great poet Alexander Pushkin supposed that Godunov had hired men to kill Dmitry. In fact, there is no concrete evidence to link Godunov to Dmitry's death. Nevertheless, the specter of Dmitry would continue to haunt Godunov for the rest of his life.

With Dmitry dead, Godunov was the natural successor to Fyodor, who died in 1598. He was duly elected by a specially convened Zemsky Sobor, thus becoming the first ruler of Russia not descended from Rurik's line. As Tsar Boris I (1598-1605), he continued to pursue an intelligent policy of social and economic reform. He continued the centralization of the Russian state and elevated the status of the Russian Orthodox Church. In 1589 he had been instrumental in establishing the Patriarchate of Moscow in opposition to the Patriarch in Muslim-ruled Constantinople. Tsar Boris was interested in the new ideas reaching Russia from western Europe and hoped to encourage their dissemination in his realm. He invited foreigners to Russia to spread western crafts and ideas and was the first Tsar to send young Russian nobles to be educated in western Europe. He pursued a peaceful foreign policy and made commercial treaties with England and the Hanseatic League. For all his intelligent efforts at reforming Russia, Tsar Boris's reign was characterized by tragedy and misfortune, as well as the beginnings of disorder and breakdown of central authority which came to be known as the Time of Troubles (1598-1613).

Three successive years of poor harvests from 1601 to 1603 resulted in catastrophic famine. Government efforts to provide relief to the affected areas were inadequate. The Russian countryside descended into anarchy as bands

of desperate men looted villages in search for sustenance. The Muscovites began to wonder whether the famines were the result of divine retribution against Tsar Boris, who had usurped the throne and perhaps ordered the murder of Dmitry. In 1604 an individual in his early twenties appeared and claimed that he was Tsarevich Dmitry. He claimed that he managed to escape Godunov's plot to kill him and the boy who was killed was a substitute. Despite Tsar Boris's attempts to prove that Dmitry was actually dead, large parts of the country recognized the man as Dmitry and proclaimed him the true tsar. Even leading Muscovite boyars began to declare themselves against Godunov. In April 1605 Tsar Boris suddenly died of illness. He was succeeded by his teenage son Fyodor II (April 1605 – June 1605), an extremely intelligent and learned man for his time, but lacking in experience and legitimacy to exert political authority. In June Fyodor was deposed and murdered, while 'Dmitry' entered the Kremlin in triumph.

It is unclear whether the people of Moscow believed that the man they had placed on the throne was truly Dmitry Ivanovich, the prince who had been declared dead for more than a decade. Russian society at this stage could not conceive of a system of government that did not involve a tsar, and this individual who claimed to be Dmitry merely served as the figurehead of a movement inspired by social discontent. Indeed, soon after the new Tsar was enthroned, doubts resurfaced about his identity. In his manners and dress he resembled a Pole. Furthermore, his court was full of prominent Poles. The Polish presence at court troubled the Russians, who were longstanding enemies of Poland. He was also engaged to a Polish noblewoman, Marina Mniszech. When the couple was married in May 1606, Marina remained a Catholic rather than converting to Orthodoxy, as was the custom for foreign princesses who married into the Russian ruling family. At the end of the month, Vasily Shuisky gathered an army of loyal supporters and marched on the Kremlin, denouncing the Tsar as an imposter who was in fact a Polish monk named Grigory Otrepev. The ruling couple attempted to escape from the pursuing masses, but the Tsar fell and was caught by the mob. They shot him and duly tore his body to pieces. As a sign of their vengeance, they burnt his remains and fired the ashes from a cannon in the direction of Poland. That was the fate of the imposter who ruled Russia for several months as False Dmitry (1605-06).

Vasily Shuisky, the leader of the rebellion against False Dmitry, assumed the throne as Tsar Vasily IV (1606-10). Vasily's authority was limited outside

Moscow and he was faced with several challenges. Despite False Dmitry's deposition in 1606, several more individuals claimed to be Tsarevich Dmitry, of which two achieved some prominence. False Dmitry II built a large following of Poles and Lithuanians and defeated an army commanded by Tsar Vasily's brother in 1808. Although he failed to take Moscow, he established a court in the village of Tushino to the north of Moscow. He was "recognized" by Marina Mniszech as her husband, and she bore him a son. In an effort to defeat the rebellion, Vasily concluded an alliance with Sweden at significant cost. The alliance was directed against Poland, which in turn declared war on Russia in 1609. In 1610, Vasily was deposed by an assembly of notables and forced to become a monk – a common strategy Russian rulers employed to remove political rivals. A seven-man boyar council was established to take charge of government affairs.

In an effort to elect a tsar who would be acceptable to all sections of society, a Zemsky Sobor was convened to examine several candidates for the throne. The assembly finally decided on the 15-year-old heir to the Polish throne, Prince Wladyslaw. Given the hostility to Poland and the fact that Russia was at war with the Poles, this choice might seem unexpected. However, there were good reasons to choose a foreign prince. The boyars realized that the elevation of one of their own as tsar would lead to jealousy among the others and prolong the civil war. Thus, they invited Wladyslaw to become tsar on the condition of his conversion to Orthodoxy. Polish troops were invited to garrison Moscow and an embassy was dispatched to King Zygmunt III's court in Warsaw. To the surprise of the Russian boyars, the Polish king rejected the offer. He opposed his son's conversion to Orthodoxy, and he was also intent on conquering Russia's western provinces and annexing them to Poland.

The Polish rejection of the Russian offer prolonged the state of anarchy in Russia. In the absence of a tsar, the Orthodox Church remained the remaining institution capable of inspiring any sense of national unity. Patriarch Hermogenes of Moscow called for Russians to liberate themselves from Polish rule. His sentiments were echoed by Avraamy Palitsyn, a senior cleric at the Trinity St. Sergius Monastery. The statesman Prokopy Lyapunov gathered a volunteer army and successfully recaptured much of Moscow by the summer of 1611, leaving the Polish garrison desperately entrenched in the Kremlin. However, Lyapunov's eclectic army failed to retain cohesion and in July he was killed by disgruntled troops and the army he led disbanded. The

cause of national liberation was subsequently taken up in the Volga fortress city of Nizhny Novgorod. A butcher by the name of Kuzma Minin inspired the citizenry with bold words and gathered donations for a Second Volunteer Army. He invited Prince Dmitry Pozharsky, who had served under Lyapunov, to take command of this forces. Minin served as quartermaster of the army and proved to be an able military commander himself. In September 1612 Minin and Pozharsky's army reached Moscow and in October the Polish garrison capitulated.

Minin and Pozharsky's success enabled the restoration of national unity, but Russia remained without a tsar. The Zemsky Sobor reconvened to discuss the question again. The potential candidates this time around were all Russian. The assembly's task was to select an individual who would not alter the existing balance of power between rival noble factions. They offered the crown to Prince Dmitry Trubetskoy, one of Pozharsky's lieutenants who played a major role in the capture of Moscow, but Trubetskoy refused, citing his family's Lithuanian ancestry. The assembly eventually decided on the 16-year-old Mikhail Fyodorovich Romanov. In comparison to families such as the Shuiskys and Pozharskys who could trace their ancestry back to Rurik, the pedigree of the Romanov family was undistinguished. The family name only dated to the 15th century, but its prestige increased when Anastasia Romanova became the first wife of Ivan the Terrible. Anastasia enjoyed a reputation as a kindly woman and was dearly loved by the Tsar. Ivan was heartbroken by her sudden death in 1560 and suspected his enemies of poisoning her. Her brother Nikita continued to play a leading role at court. During the reign of Fyodor I, Nikita's son Fyodor Romanov inherited his father's position at court. When his rival Godunov took the throne, Fyodor was forced to take monastic vows under the name Filaret. During the Time of Troubles, Filaret supported False Dmitry and was appointed Patriarch of Moscow in False Dmitry II's court. In 1610 he was taken into Polish captivity, where he remained when his son was elected tsar in February 1613. The assembly believed they could control the young Tsar Mikhail (1613-45) by obliging him to take advice from the Zemsky Sobor by convening the assembly annually. This arrangement was a long way from constitutional monarchy, but rather an effort by the boyars to reclaim the influence and power they lost during the reign of Ivan the Terrible.

Chapter 8 – The Road to Reform

The election of Mikhail and the inauguration of the Romanov dynasty marked the end of the Troubles. This conclusion is easy to draw with the benefit of hindsight, but it was not so clear to contemporary observers. Tsar Mikhail was a teenager and the unity demonstrated by the boyars in his election could fall apart at any time. The Russians reestablished their authority in Moscow but continued to be engaged in conflict with both Poland and Sweden. The Tsar's father remained in Polish captivity and served as a useful bargaining chip for the Poles. When the Treaty of Deulino was signed with Poland in 1618, Russia paid a heavy price. The ancient cities of Smolensk and Chernigov were ceded to the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth. Meanwhile, Filaret returned to Russia and was confirmed as Patriarch of Moscow, head of the Russian Orthodox Church. The Patriarchate enjoyed significant power and resources on its own account, but as a father to the monarch, Filaret effectively ruled Russia on his son's behalf. Upon Filaret's death in 1633, Mikhail ruled on his own account. He summoned the Zemsky Sobor less frequently as he sought to centralize his authority.

Tsar Mikhail died in 1645 after a rather uneventful 32-year reign. In the aftermath of the political turmoil during the Time of Troubles, this may be considered a success. Mikhail was succeeded by his son Alexey (1645-76). The early years of Alexey's reign saw a return to the social unrest that characterized the beginning of the century. Alexey's chief advisor in these years was Boris Morozov, who had served as his tutor. Morozov sought to raise revenue for the state by increasing taxes on a number of goods, including salt. These efforts triggered the salt riots of May 1648, when the inhabitants of Moscow rose up and killed a large number of tsarist officials and demanded the head of Morozov, who managed to escape. Alexey mobilized troops to suppress the uprising, but he recognized he needed to take steps to appease public discontent. He called a Zemsky Sobor to produce a new legal code that updated Ivan the Terrible's Sudebnik of 1550. The new law code, the *Ulozhenie* of 1649, regulated the mass of edicts that had been promulgated in the previous century. The code was a concession to the nobility and townsmen, but it also placed restrictions on peasants' freedom of movement. Thus, the institution serfdom was defined in law.

Alexey's Ulozhenie gave the nobility the sole right to own serfs. This privilege was granted in return for noble service in the Russian army. Over

the course of his reign Alexey presided over reforms that improved the fighting qualities of the Russian army. Recent wars against Poland demonstrated that the Russian model of warfare, reliant on quick movements and initiative, was no match for disciplined armies in formation. New regiments of soldiers were formed along western European lines and equipped with imported firearms, which were better quality than those in Russia. These regiments were usually commanded by foreign officers, who drilled the men in line infantry tactics, whereby lines of infantrymen could fire in volleys while advancing and retreating. The majority of western Europeans in Russia came from Germany. A German Quarter was created for these immigrants, both to segregate them from the native population, but also to guarantee them freedom of worship and security from xenophobic conservatives. Following the English Civil War, Alexey invited scores of Scottish émigrés who fled the country upon King Charles I's defeat and execution. These regiments were employed effectively when hostilities resumed against Poland in 1654. Russia answered the call of Cossack Hetman Bogdan Khmelnitsky, who instigated an uprising against his Polish overlords. The Russian army supported the Cossacks and managed to inflict several defeats on the Polish forces. When the war ended in 1667 with the Peace of Andrusovo, Russia regained Smolensk and assumed control over eastern Ukraine, including the city of Kiev.

The annexation of Ukrainian territories to the east of the River Dniepr (so-called Left Bank Ukraine) encouraged the diffusion of western European learning to Tsar Alexey's Russia. Since Ukraine had been a Polish possession, its religious and scholarly community was familiar with developments in Catholic Europe. Clerics educated in Kiev moved to Moscow to serve in senior ecclesiastical posts. The Tsar's children were educated in Greek and Latin. One of the most important events in 17th Russia, perhaps in Russia's entire history, was the Great Schism of the Russian Orthodox Church. The split came about after Patriarch Nikon introduced wide-ranging reforms to Orthodox worship in 1653. These changes in ritual were on the basis of new interpretations of scripture based on the original Greek text. Among the most controversial changes was the stipulation that the Orthodox faithful should make the sign of the cross with three fingers rather than two. The Church was thus split between the New Believers and the Old Believers. Tsar Alexey supported Nikon's reforms, causing the Old Believers to denounce the tsarist state as heretical. The Old Believers would

continue to oppose the Russian state for several centuries.

Although Alexey supported Nikon in his reforms of the Orthodox Church, he came to resent the Patriarch's interference in secular affairs. In 1658 Nikon retired to the New Jerusalem Monastery which he had founded as a replica of the Church of the Holy Sepulchre in Jerusalem. In 1666 Nikon was officially tried by a Church court and removed from office. The power struggle consolidated the Tsar's authority over the Orthodox Church. This development, together with the Nikonian reforms in the Church, weakened the conservativism of the Russian state to some degree. Foreigners living in Moscow's German Quarter were engaged in industry and commerce. The more progressive boyars had their city palaces built in western architectural styles, including the Baroque, which was fashionable throughout Europe. Russian painters trained in the art of icon painting – reproducing images of saints based on popular standards – began to receive instruction from German and Italian artists, who painted portraits of living people. When Alexey died in 1676, he was succeeded by his son Fyodor III (1676-1682). Although heavily disabled and expected to die young, Fyodor was intelligent and continued his father's reforms. In 1682 he sanctioned the establishment of the Slavic Latin Greek Academy in Moscow, Russia's first higher education institution. He also abolished the system of *mestnichestvo*, which ranked families based on their aristocratic lineage.

Fyodor died in 1682 at the age of 21, already surviving beyond expectations. His younger brother, the 18-year-old Ivan, was next in line to the throne and would have been expected to assume the throne. However, Ivan was physically and mentally disabled and even less capable of ruling than his late brother. Consequently, Ivan was passed over in favor of his half-brother, the 10-year-old Tsarevich Peter, who became Tsar Peter I (1682-1725). The decision triggered a political conflict between the families of Tsar Alexey's two wives. Ivan was the son of Maria Miloslavskaya, Alexey's first wife, who died in 1669. Peter was the son of Natalia Naryshkina, whom Alexey married in 1671. The streltsy revolted in support of the Miloslavskys and killed several of Peter's supporters and relatives on the steps of the Palace of Facets in the Kremlin. Eventually, a compromise was reached and both Ivan and Peter would rule as co-tsars, with Ivan V (1682-96) as senior tsar. In reality, since Ivan was incapable of ruling and Peter was too young, political power lay in the hands of Ivan's elder sister Tsarevna Sofia, who assumed the regency.

By all accounts, Sofia was an extraordinary woman for her time. Royal daughters were expected to remain out of sight and secluded in their quarters, effectively a form of secular monasticism. Due to their exalted status, they could only marry foreign princes, but tsars were not always keen to have their daughters married off to foreigners unless there were diplomatic benefits in doing so. Tsarevna Sofia was an intelligent woman who received instruction from the court tutor Simeon Polotsky, a cleric from modern-day Belarus who had studied in Kiev and Lithuania. When her brother Fyodor died, Sofia decided to take an active political role to defend the interests of her family, the Miloslavskys, as well as to avoid the prospect of being secluded in her quarters for the rest of her life. Sofia was assisted by Vasily Golitsyn, a statesman and military commander from a distinguished boyar family. Rumors of a romantic relationship between the two are impossible to prove. In 1687 and 1689 Golitsyn led two expeditions against Crimea, which remained a Tatar khanate as a vassal of the Ottoman sultan. The Russians enjoyed initial successes but ran into difficulties in the arid climate. On both occasions Golitsyn was forced to return to Moscow with significant losses, mainly as a result of disease and starvation. Nevertheless, the armies were greeted with triumphant airs as though they had been victorious.

Golitsyn's "victories" in Crimea fooled no-one. Support for Sofia and Golitsyn's government began to ebb away. By 1689 Tsar Peter turned 17 and reached his majority, leading to calls for Sofia to relinquish the regency and hand the reins of power to her half-brother. Sofia, keen to maintain her family's interests, responded to these calls by seeking to assume the title of Tsaritsa, taking the unprecedented step of ruling Russia as a female monarch in her own name. This step was far too radical for the conservative boyars to entertain. Meanwhile, Peter had taken refuge behind the walls of the Trinity St. Sergius Monastery after being warned of an assassination attempt. Increasing numbers of courtiers and army units left Moscow in the middle of the night and made their way to the monastery, declaring their support for Peter. Peter's supporters duly overthrew Sofia, who was sent to the Novodevichy Convent in southwest Moscow, where she would remain until her death in 1704. Ivan V remained Peter's co-tsar, and the two half-brothers appear to have enjoyed warm relations with each other until the former's death in 1696. Political power was nevertheless firmly within the hands of Peter and the Naryshkin faction.

Peter had not been idle during his teenage years, when he held the legal title

of Tsar but had no political power. Peter and his mother Natalia lived in a palace in the suburb of Izmailovskoe to the northeast of Moscow. Peter was curious by nature and took an interest in many things around him. He enjoyed playing war games with friends and conducted mock battles. He would split his friends into two forces, which over time assumed the names Preobrazhensky and Semenovsky after nearby villages. These regiments were derisively labeled by Peter's superiors as toy regiments, but as he matured Peter was given live ammunition and weapons from the state armory to use in his games. The Preobrazhensky and Semenovsky Regiments would form the backbone of Peter's guard in the early years of his reign. Peter also took an interest in naval affairs and shipbuilding, becoming both a keen sailor and shipwright despite his mother's objections. As an adolescent he often visited the German Quarter, where he would meet with foreign masters and learn their skills. He enjoyed the licentiousness of the district and often indulged himself in drink, a habit which would remain with him throughout his life. Peter regarded several inhabitants of the German Quarter as his close friends. One such individual was Franz Lefort, a Swiss military officer who was a frequent drinking companion. Another was the Scotsman Patrick Gordon, a veteran general who made a major contribution to the overthrow of Sofia's regime. Both men played prominent roles in Peter's early reign as he sought to consolidate power and transform the social, cultural, and political fabric of Russia.

Chapter 9 – Imperial Majesty

Peter's experience in the German Quarter caused him to recognize the benefits of modernization. Russia lagged behind western Europe both in terms of ideas and technology, thanks largely to the conservative influence of the Orthodox Church. During the reign of Tsar Alexey, a small degree of foreign influence could be seen in Moscow. Peter accelerated the process and hoped to transform his people into Europeans in a political, social, and cultural sense. He recognized that western Europeans were more prosperous and lived better lives. Peter believed that in order to be European, his subjects had to dress like Europeans. In the late 1690s, Peter introduced a number of measures regulated fashion at court. The long fur-lined kaftans worn by the Russian aristocracy were phased out and replaced by so-called "Hungarian dress," but which were, in reality, a pan-European style. In an even more radical step, Peter ordered that his courtiers shave off their beards. For Orthodox believers, beards were part of God's inheritance and to shave them off was considered sacrilege. Some particularly conservative Russians may have preferred to have their head cut off instead. Peter allowed exemptions for the merchant community, but they were obliged to pay a tax for the right to wear their beards. In return they were given a token which was inscribed with the words "The beard is a superfluous object." In the case of particularly reticent nobles, Peter would personally take a pair of scissors and cut off a courtier's beard. In another symbolic measure, in 1700 Peter changed the Russian calendar. Russians had previously numbered their years from the creation of the world and the new year was celebrated on 1 September. Peter adopted the Julian Calendar on 1 January 1700 to bring Russia in line with the European powers.

The Tsar realized that in order to achieve his ambitions to make Russia a prosperous country, it needed to be engaged in international trade. The ancient trading entrepots of Pskov and Novgorod, ravaged by war and destruction, were a shadow of their former selves. What Russia needed above all was access to the sea. While Peter had access to the Arctic Ocean at Archangelsk and conducted trade with the Dutch and English from the port, it was far from ideal, since the sea was only navigable for four months in the summer once the ice had melted. At first, Peter looked south to the Black

Sea. In 1696 he captured the fort of Azov from the Crimean Tatars. Peter's military engagements brought him into conflict with the Ottoman Empire, the protectors of the Tatars. The Tsar hoped to find military support from the European powers in the war. He set off in 1697 on a Grand Embassy across Europe seeking allies. He visited royal courts at Amsterdam, London, Paris and Vienna, returning in 1698. None of the great powers was particularly interested in an alliance.

Nevertheless, the Grand Embassy was by no means a failure. Peter spent several months in Amsterdam and London learning crafts including carpentry and shipbuilding. Peter managed to master seventeen different skills in his lifetime. The Russian Tsar, although physically a giant at a height of over two meters, was hardworking and modest. He believed that he had to learn manual trades himself if he were to persuade his subjects to take them up. He invited hundreds of craftsmen from all over Europe to Russia in order to teach his subjects.

In terms of diplomacy, Peter's efforts during the Grand Embassy were not entirely in vain either. He established warm relations with Elector Augustus II of Saxony, who was also the elected King of Poland. In 1700 Augustus invited Peter to join an alliance with King Frederick IV of Denmark. This triple alliance hoped to take advantage of the political situation in Sweden, where the young Charles XII had just succeeded to the throne at the age of eighteen. All three powers hoped to conquer Swedish territories in the southern Baltic, and Peter realized that Russian control of the Baltic shore would allow him access to the sea and the potential for lucrative trade links with the rest of the continent. The allies were confident of a swift victory, but underestimated their young opponent. In 1700 After defeating a Danish invasion and forcing Frederick to come to terms by the summer, Charles turned his focus to the Russian army, defeating a far larger force commanded by Peter at Narva in November. The Swedish King then turned to Augustus, who was his strongest member of the alliance. After six years of heavy fighting, Charles was able to remove Augustus from the Polish throne in 1706.

While Charles was embroiled in Poland, Peter reformed the Russian army to prevent a repeat of the debacle at Narva. He labored day and night to train a disciplined, well-armed fighting force. These efforts soon paid dividends as Peter won minor successes in the north, defeating Swedish generals and taking control of the River Neva. In 1703 he founded the city of St.

Petersburg on the marshy Neva delta. After defeating Augustus in 1706, Charles XII turned back to Russia. He launched an invasion of Russia in 1709 and met little resistance. Peter ordered his armies to fall back and destroy any supplies that might be useful to the Swedish army. Charles found eastward progress difficult and headed south to Ukraine in an effort to replenish his supplies. He met the Russian army near Poltava and was comprehensively defeated. The Battle of Poltava signaled the rise of Russia at the expense of Sweden. By 1714 a Russian fleet defeated the Swedish Navy at Cape Hango and the Russian army occupied Swedish Finland. When the Peace of Nystad was signed between the warring parties in 1721, Sweden ceded a large amount of territory to Russia. In the peace treaty, Peter referred to himself as "Emperor and Tsar of All the Russias." This new title was taken from the Latin *Imperator* and reflected the western European influence on Peter's rule. Meanwhile, Peter was also granted the honorific title Peter the Great.

Peter's empire was no longer governed from the ancient capital of Moscow but from the newly-founded city of St. Petersburg, where government institutions were transferred in 1712. The city was built on marshland on the Neva delta, several miles downstream from where Alexander Nevsky had defeated the Swedes several centuries earlier. Peter first ordered the construction of the Peter and Paul Fortress on Hare Island. This began as a primitive wooden structure, but was soon rebuilt in stone to the design of the Swiss architect Domenico Trezzini. The fort was constructed in the form of a star, with low ramparts and powerful bastions, inspired by the fortifications built by Vauban, King Louis XIV of France's great military engineer. Trezzini was also responsible for the Peter and Paul Cathedral, a Baroque edifice with a 91-meter spire that remains one of the distinctive features of the city's skyline. Another important institution was the Admiralty, located to the south of the fortress opposite the Neva. This would serve as the base for the construction of the Russian Baltic Fleet, as well for Russia's commercial trade. The Admiralty stood at one end of Nevsky Prospekt, the city's main thoroughfare. The road extended to the Alexander Nevsky Monastery, where Peter transferred the relics of the great warrior saint. Nevsky Prospekt was built by two teams of workers, each starting at one end of the road. When they realized they made an error in their calculations the two sections of road would not meet in the middle, they constructed a wedge-shaped square to connect the two sections.

Peter never envisaged that the Great Northern War would occupy so much of his reign. When the war ended, he made up for lost time by introducing a series of domestic and social reforms. The most consequential of these measures was the Table of Ranks in 1722, which replaced the old mestnichestvo system. Peter aimed to instill meritocratic values into Russian society. He divided offices in the armed forces, civil service, and royal court into fourteen ranks. Everyone regardless of birth began at the bottom and worked their way up the ranks by merit. Non-nobles who reached the 8th rank and above would assume hereditary nobility. Thus, the Table of Ranks was also the means by which Peter reorganized the Russian aristocracy, having abolished the rank of boyar. Although the Table of Ranks would be satirized by Russian political writers in subsequent centuries and many distinguished families soon made their way into the upper ranks, the measure was seen at the time as a radical effort to reform and modernize Russian society. Another measure aimed at encouraging progress was Peter's Church reform. When Patriarch Adrian died in 1700, Peter did not name a replacement. He finally abolished the institution in 1721 and replaced it with the Ecclesiastical College, soon renamed the Holy Governing Synod. Peter effectively established state authority over the Church and named the clerical reformer Feofan Prokopovich as the effective head of the Synod.

Peter died in 1725 at the age of 52. He was buried in the Peter and Paul Cathedral, which would serve as the imperial mausoleum. In his final years Peter changed the succession law to give the Tsar the right to nominate his successor. His eldest son, Tsarevich Alexei, had opposed his father's reforms and died in prison in 1718 after being accused of treason. Peter intended to make his second wife Catherine his heir, and in 1724 staged a coronation ceremony in which she was named co-ruler. However, their relations soon soured when Peter learned of Catherine's affair with a courtier, and by the time of his death Peter did not name an heir. Nevertheless, Catherine succeeded her husband to the throne and ruled as Empress Catherine I (1725-27). The French enlightenment philosopher Voltaire remarked that Catherine's life was even more remarkable than that of her husband. She had been born a peasant in Livonia named Martha Skavronskaya. During the Great Northern War, she was briefly married to a Swedish soldier before being captured by the Russian army and taken as a mistress by Peter's favorite Prince Alexander Menshikov. Peter admired her intellect and beauty, as well as her capacity for drink, and made her his mistress. The two were

secretly married in 1707, before a more public ceremony in 1712. When Peter died she was elevated to the throne due to Menshikov's support, though she achieved little during her two-year reign. Nevertheless, there is no doubt that she enjoyed a remarkable and eventful life.

Catherine was the first of several rulers who came to the throne as a result of palace intrigues. Her successor was Peter II (1727-30), the grandson of Peter the Great through Tsarevich Alexei. Aged 12, Peter was too young to rule and political power continued to be exercised by Menshikov, who hoped to make his daughter Maria the bride of the new Tsar. Menshikov unexpectedly fell ill soon afterward. His political opponents at court took advantage of the situation to remove him from power and exile him to Siberia. After Peter was crowned in Moscow in 1728, the court remained in the old capital. Neither Peter nor his nobles wished to return to St. Petersburg. The Tsar fell under the influence of Alexei Dolgorukov, who brokered an engagement between his daughter Ekaterina and Tsar Peter. The couple were due to be married in Moscow on 19 January 1730. However, Peter suddenly fell ill with smallpox and died on the day of his wedding at the age of 15. The Muscovite nobles debated among themselves which of potential heirs they would invite to take the throne. Their choice eventually fell upon Anna Ivanovna, Duchess of Courland, the daughter of Peter's half-brother Ivan V. A group of eight magnates believed that by inviting Anna to the throne, they could extract concessions from her. The offer of the throne included several conditions intended to limit the new monarch's power. Anna accepted these conditions but by the time she arrived in Moscow, she dramatically tore the conditions in half, declaring that she was answerable only to God. The minor nobility supported her position, preferring to serve one rather than several masters.

The reign of Empress Anna (1730-40) has traditionally been characterized as a period of misrule and foreign influence. She returned the court to St. Petersburg, where it remained until 1917. Anna's reign was dominated by Count Ernst Johann von Biron, a Baltic German of modest birth. Biron was close to Anna while the latter was Duchess of Courland and the two are likely to have engaged in a romantic relationship. When Anna became Empress of Russia, Biron was given substantial wealth and enjoyed political power due to his influence over the Empress. He used his position to take bribes and increase his wealth. Russian aristocrats also resented the "German" fashions introduced to Russia by Biron. Meanwhile, Anna herself is characterized as a sadistic and brutal figure with unconventional tastes. This side of her

personality was demonstrated by her construction of an Ice Palace to celebrate the wedding between her court jester (a recently demoted nobleman) and an old peasant woman. The couple were invited to spend the night in the palace sleeping on an ice bed. However, despite this characterization, Biron was a competent administrator who stabilized the government amid the palace intrigue, while Anna made significant contributions to the development of Russia's secular culture. She invited Italian composers to write operas for her court and presided over the establishment of a ballet company.

When Anna died, she named as her heir the infant Ivan VI (1740-41), the son of her niece. Ivan was two months old when he became Emperor but his reign lasted a mere thirteen months before he was overthrown by Elizabeth (1741-61), Peter the Great's daughter. In December 1761, Elizabeth led a company of Guards and took power in a bloodless coup, placing her young predecessor in captivity. Elizabeth's reign is associated with profligacy and extravagance. There is no doubt that Elizabeth was a spendthrift. At her death it was discovered that she owned over 16,000 dresses. The Empress' luxurious tastes, no matter how fiscally irresponsible, left a great cultural legacy in St. Petersburg. Her favorite architect was the Italian Bartolomeo Rastrelli, who had already designed several palaces for Anna. Rastrelli's extravagant Baroque style satisfied Elizabeth's tastes. He was responsible for the design of several of the most famous buildings in St. Petersburg and its surroundings, including the Winter Palace and the Smolny Convent, together with the suburban palaces of Peterhof and the Great Catherine Palace in Tsarskoe Selo. Under the reign of Elizabeth, St. Petersburg became the cultural jewel of Russia and a symbol of Russia's imperial splendor. Elizabeth also presided over the establishment of Moscow State University, which was founded by the polymath Mikhail Lomonosov in 1755. The university remains Russia's most prestigious academic institution.

Chapter 10 – Enlightened Despotism

Elizabeth died on Christmas Day 1761 according to the Russian calendar. At the time of her death, she was engaged in the Seven Years War as part of a Russo-Franco-Austrian alliance against King Frederick the Great of Prussia. Despite Frederick's victories against the odds, by the winter of 1761, the Russian army enjoyed considerable successes and were in occupation of East Prussia. The allies seemed poised to wipe Prussia off the map. Elizabeth's death brought to the throne Peter III (1761-62), Peter the Great's grandson through his daughter Anna Petrovna. Peter was Duke of Holstein and was brought up speaking German before moving to the Russian court. He worshipped Frederick the Great and pursued a pro-Prussian foreign policy, immediately withdrawing the Russian army from the war. This provoked great hostility among the military elite, who were furious that their conquests and sacrifice had been in vain. In the summer of 1762 Peter was removed from power by Guards officers who proclaimed his wife as Empress Catherine II (1762-1796). This time, the overthrow was not so bloodless. Peter was placed under house arrest at Ropsha Palace and died days later. The official notice stated he had succumbed to stomach illness, but assassination is far more likely. In order to consolidate her position, in 1764 Catherine ordered the death of the unfortunate Ivan VI, who died at the age of 24 having spent almost all his life in captivity.

Peter III may have pursued a pro-Prussian policy and behaved as a German, but he was at the very least the grandson of Peter the Great. By contrast, Catherine did not have a single drop of Russian blood flowing through her veins. She was born in Stettin as Princess Sophie Friederike Auguste of Anhalt-Zerbst, and her father served as a general in the Prussian army. In 1744, aged 15, she was taken to Russia to marry Peter, the heir to the Russian throne. She converted to Orthodoxy and took the name Ekaterina Alexeevna. After initial attempts to ingratiate herself with her husband, Catherine soon realized that he was interested in little else than playing with toy soldiers. Unlike her husband, Catherine made every effort to cultivate the affection of the Russian people. She studied the language intensively and demonstrated an interest in folk culture. She conducted several affairs, with Sergei Saltykov, Stanislaw Poniatowski, and Grigory Orlov. Saltykov was rumored to be the

father of her son Paul, born in 1755. This seems unlikely, since Paul's character closely resembled Peter III in adulthood. Although Peter had his own mistress in Elizaveta Vorontsova, he was incensed by Catherine's affairs. Rumors that Peter was planning to marry Elizaveta and confine Catherine into a convent – common practice for divorced wives – may have led Catherine to instigate the coup that led to Peter's downfall.

Catherine was influenced by Enlightenment ideas and engaged in correspondence with the philosophers Voltaire and Denis Diderot. She hoped to apply enlightened principles in her exercise of power over her vast empire. In 1767 she established a Legislative Commission to codify the Russian laws which had been introduced since Tsar Alexey's Ulozhenie of 1649. She sent the commission a list of guiding principles known as the *Bolshoi Nakaz* or Great Instruction. The Nakaz began with the declaration "Russia is a European country," reflecting Catherine's efforts to associate her empire with European political and cultural traditions, rejecting the pejorative "Asiatic" label that some western European observers used to describe Russia. Catherine also stated that absolute monarchy was the best form of government in such a vast empire as Russia. The majority of the articles in the Nakaz were copied almost verbatim from the works of the French enlightenment philosopher Montesquieu and the Italian legal reformer Cesare Beccaria. The document was remarkably radical for its time and Catherine's advisers encouraged her to tone down some of the recommendations. The Legislative Commission – representative of almost all sections of Russian society – met in Moscow to deliberate over the issue. The issues were so complex that the Commission could not come to a decision, and Catherine decided to adjourn the sitting of the Commission in 1768. It was never reconvened, and in 1774 Catherine finally abandoned the project.

In the 1770s, Catherine had greater preoccupations than her legislative reforms. In 1773 news of a Cossack rebellion in southern Russia reached the capital. The leader of the rebellion claimed to be the late Peter III, but his real identity was that of Emelyan Pugachev, a Cossack leader. Pugachev recruited a large rebel army, persuading large numbers of serfs to support his cause. During his short reign, Peter III had issued an Emancipation Manifesto which would free the nobility from state service, and peasants imagined that he might also emancipate the serfs. Pugachev promised to end serfdom and taxation for Russia's lower classes. Village priests, even local officers and townsmen joined the rebels as a sign of their grievances against Catherine's

government. Pugachev's men won several victories against regular Russian troops and occupied the cities of Kazan and Astrakhan. Catherine realized her empire was in danger. By 1774, the increasing numbers of troops she sent to pacify the rebellion achieved their objective. Pugachev was taken into captivity in September and executed in St. Petersburg in January 1775. The fear of peasant rebellion must have been a motivating factor in Catherine's decision to abandon the Legislative Commission. Nevertheless, Catherine did legislate to grant privileges to the nobles and townsmen. In 1785 she issued the Charter of the Nobility, giving nobles the sole right to own serfs, as well as the right to retire from state service. The same year, she promulgated the Charter of the Towns which gave townsmen commercial privileges. Catherine's failure to produce a similar charter for the Russian peasantry was a major shortcoming of her reign.

In the popular imagination, Catherine has a reputation for taking a series of lovers to whom she granted extraordinary wealth and power. It is certainly true that over the course of her life Catherine had approximately fifteen lovers, but this is by no means an indication of promiscuity. Many of Catherine's male contemporaries would have kept a larger number of mistresses. There is little doubt Catherine's that lovers played a significant role in the political developments of her reign. Grigory Orlov and his three brothers were key players in the overthrow of Peter III. The most iconic of Catherine's lovers was Grigory Potemkin. Their romantic relationship lasted only two years between 1774 and 1776, but Potemkin and Catherine maintained a close friendship until his death. Potemkin held one of the senior commands in Catherine's wars against the Ottoman Empire, alongside Field Marshal Pyotr Rumyantsev and General Alexander Suvorov, who enjoys the reputation of being the most successful military officer in Russian history. Potemkin presided over the conquest of Ukraine and Crimea. Potemkin was named Governor General of Ukraine in 1774, and he founded the cities of Ekaterinoslav (now Dnipro/Dnipropetrovsk), Odessa, and Simferopol. When Catherine visited the area in 1787 it is claimed that Potemkin created fake settlements – so-called Potemkin villages – to give the impression that the cities were larger and grander than in reality. Certainly, Potemkin engaged in some airbrushing to impress Catherine, but the cities which he founded are among the largest and most important in modern Ukraine. His death in 1791 left Catherine heartbroken.

Catherine's expansion of territory in the south at the expense of the Ottoman

Empire caused some observers to question her credentials as an enlightened monarch. Another source of criticism was her policy in relation to Poland. Over the course of the 18th century, Russia was in the ascendant while Poland was in decline. In 1764, Catherine engineered the election of her former lover Stanislaw Poniatowski as King of Poland, expecting him to rule as a Russian vassal. These expectations were not realized as Stanislaw proved himself to be an energetic reformer, seeking to strengthen the institutions of the Polish monarchy and reduce the influence of the nobility, which could place major limitations on the King's authority. Stanislaw's reforms caused anxiety among his neighbors. The prospect of a Poland with a strong central authority and a strengthened military threatened the national security of Prussia, Austria, and Russia. In 1772 Empress Catherine of Russia, together with King Frederick the Great of Prussia and Empress Maria Theresia of Austria signed a treaty to partition Poland. Stanislaw was in no position to resist and capitulated to their demands, surrendering a third of his territory. Two more partitions followed in 1793 and 1795 until the state was eliminated from the map of Europe. Some powerful Polish nobles supported the partitions and received guarantees that they could keep their estates.

During the final years of her reign, Catherine struggled over the consequences of the French Revolution of 1789. She initially welcomed some aspects of the revolution since it corresponded with her enlightened principles, which she maintained despite the shortcomings of her reign. However, as the revolution assumed a more radical character, and especially after the execution of King Louis XVI in 1792, Catherine turned against France. She promised to supply 40,000 Russian troops to the coalition which had formed against France, but was preoccupied with affairs in Poland. She argued that the Polish patriots who rebelled against the partitions were part of the same republican movement aimed at overthrowing monarchical regimes. While there were certainly intellectual connections between the French revolutionaries and the Polish patriots, geographical distance prevented them from providing material assistance to each other. Nevertheless, it was a convenient excuse for Catherine not to be actively involved in the anti-French coalition. Catherine also made efforts to crack down on what she considered seditious literature in Russia. In 1790 Alexander Radishchev had written a pamphlet entitled *A Journey from Moscow to St. Petersburg*, where he criticized autocratic rule and highlighted the injustices of serfdom. Radishchev hoped that Catherine would return to her early principles and

reinitiate her reforms, but in the context of the French Revolution, she believed the author was inciting revolution and exiled him to Siberia.

Catherine died in late 1796 at the age of 67. Her reforms and her conquests earned her the honorific title of Catherine the Great. Her greatest legacy, however, was as a patroness of the arts. Over the course of her reign she acquired several famed collections of Old Master paintings, which she displayed at the Hermitage, a new building constructed adjacent to the Winter Palace to house her art collection. Catherine was not a particularly discerning collector and she did not have particularly refined artistic tastes, but she made the acquisitions to increase Russia's cultural prestige. The Hermitage is Russia's most popular museum, attracting more than four million visitors every year. Another major cultural achievement during Catherine's reign was the construction of a large equestrian monument to Peter the Great. The vast bronze statue was designed by the Frenchman Étienne-Maurice Falconet and placed on a pedestal fashioned from a single slab of granite called the Thunder Stone, transported from Finland. Latin and Russian inscriptions on the side of the pedestal read "To Peter the First from Catherine the Second," reflecting Catherine's efforts to position herself as the heir to Peter's legacy. The monument is the subject of Alexander Pushkin's poem *The Bronze Horseman*, which serves as a metaphor for the city's grandiose but sinister history.

Catherine was succeeded by her son Paul I (1796-1801). Paul was opposed to his mother's policies and shared his father's passion for military matters. He enjoyed drilling soldiers on the parade ground in front of the Gatchina Palace and dressed his men in Prussian uniforms. He reversed Catherine's policies and dismissed courtiers and generals on a whim, causing the nobility to feel insecure. In 1797 he introduced a new Law of Succession which restored male primogeniture and effectively excluded women from the succession. This is often regarded as a reaction against his mother and female monarchs in general, but the succession law had its merits and largely prevented the palace intrigues which engulfed Russia in the 18th century. Paul imagined himself as a medieval knight in the Catholic tradition, and he accepted an invitation to become the Grand Master of the Order of St. John and sovereign and protector of the island of Malta, which had been occupied by the French and subsequently the British during the French Revolutionary Wars. He ordered the construction of the Mikhailovsky Castle, an imposing fortress around an octagonal courtyard which he believed would provide him with

extra security. He moved into the castle in early 1801 before its completion but within a couple of months was overthrown by disillusioned courtiers and generals. Paul refused to abdicate and was killed in the ensuing struggle.

Chapter 11 – Master of Europe

Paul was succeeded by his son Alexander I (1801-25). Alexander's involvement in the coup that killed his father is unclear, but it seems that he sanctioned the insurrection on the condition that Paul would be unharmed. Alexander enjoyed a liberal upbringing under the tutelage of the Swiss scholar Frédéric César de La Harpe, who was invited to St. Petersburg by Catherine the Great. Catherine seemed to hope that her grandson might be able to return to her enlightened reforms when the political climate was more opportune. Catherine seriously considered nominating Alexander as her heir, bypassing Paul, although she died before she could execute these desires. Although he admired and respected his grandmother and sought to please her, Alexander shared his father's passion for the military. Some of Alexander's biographers have suggested that the need for Alexander to please both his father and grandmother serves to explain his contradictory personality, which caused foreign observers to call him the "Russian sphinx." Whatever the truth of the matter, Alexander's reign was characterized by attempts at domestic reform, punctuated by extended periods of war.

Alexander came to the throne as a hopeful reformer. He surrounded himself with a circle of young friends who formed the Unofficial Committee. The most influential member of this group was Prince Adam Czartoryski, a Polish noble who hoped to persuade the Tsar to restore Polish statehood. The Unofficial Committee discussed a range of proposals for social and political reforms. In 1802 the Russian government was reorganized into eight ministries with a cabinet of ministers. In 1809 Alexander asked his chief advisor Mikhail Speransky to work on a proposal for constitutional reform. Speransky's document was presented to the Tsar in 1810 and called for a bicameral legislature, inspired by the British Parliament and the nascent US Congress. The State Council would serve as the upper house and a representative State Duma as the lower house with legislative power. Speransky's plan was only realized in part, as Alexander established the State Council to advise him on political affairs. The Duma was too radical for its time and Alexander shelved the plans. Both the Unofficial Committee and Speransky examined the status of serfdom but failed to produce a realistic plan to reform or abolish the institution. In the 1810s serfdom was abolished

in Russia's Baltic provinces, but the freed peasants were given no land and forced to stay on their masters' estates.

Alexander I's reforms did not follow a consistent plan. The primary cause of this was Alexander's shifting political priorities in the context of the Napoleonic Wars. The Russian armies had been actively involved in the French Revolutionary Wars since 1798, when Field Marshal Alexander Suvorov's army won a series of brilliant victories over some of the French Revolution's best generals in Italy. Suvorov's crossing of the Alps into Switzerland in 1799 was a legendary feat, but was precipitated by disagreements between the Russians and their Austrian allies and led to strategic defeat. In 1800, exasperated by the failure of his Austrian and British allies to honor their commitments, Paul switched sides and signed an alliance with Napoleon aimed at British colonial possessions in India. These military ventures were abandoned after Paul's murder in 1801, and Russia and France maintained peaceful relations until 1805.

Napoleon Bonaparte, a swashbuckling general in the French Revolutionary Army, seized power in France in 1799 and ruled over the French Republic as First Consul. In 1804 he crowned himself Emperor of the French in an elaborate ceremony at Notre Dame. Alexander, who held the title of Emperor himself, did not welcome the prospect of the "Corsican upstart" joining the elite club. Furthermore, Alexander had been incensed by Napoleon's orders for the kidnapping and execution in 1804 of the Duc d'Enghien, a French aristocrat who had a claim to the throne. Napoleon's Foreign Minister Talleyrand later remarked, "it was worse than a crime, it was a mistake." These considerations caused Russia to join an alliance with Austria and Britain against France. Napoleon was intent on launching an amphibious invasion of Britain and gathered his Grande Armée on France's western shores. Austria and Russia hoped to take the opportunity to strike in central Europe while Napoleon was preoccupied with his invasion of Britain. However, an effective blockade of the French navy by the British Royal Navy prevented Napoleon from executing his plans.

Even before the defeat at the Battle of Trafalgar in October 1805, Napoleon turned his army east to confront the Austrians and Russians. The allies were surprised by Napoleon's quick maneuvering and an Austrian army was forced to surrender at Ulm, while the Russian army under the command of Mikhail Kutuzov was still marching to its aid. On 2 December, Napoleon defeated the allied army at Austerlitz. Alexander, against Kutuzov's advice,

fell into Napoleon's trap by weakening his center and the French counter-attack was devastating for the unsuspecting allied army. Austria soon came to terms with Napoleon but Russia continued to fight as Napoleon turned his sights on Prussia in 1806. The Russian armies did not arrive in time to prevent the Prussians from suffering catastrophic defeats at the Battles of Jena and Auerstedt. In February 1807 Napoleon fought General Bennigsen's Russian army to a standstill at Eylau before a comprehensive victory at Friedland in June. Tsar Alexander decided to come to terms with Napoleon at Tilsit, receiving better than expected terms at the expense of Prussia.

Although Napoleon appeared magnanimous to Alexander, the Peace of Tilsit did involve some serious obligations. Russia joined Napoleon's Continental System, which prevented trade with British ships. Russia and Britain had enjoyed a lucrative trading relationship in St. Petersburg, its aristocratic and merchant community benefitted from the British trade and suffered from the restrictions imposed by the Continental System. By 1810, the Russians intensified secret trade with British ships flying neutral flags. Alexander's failure to adhere to the Continental System incensed Napoleon, who began planning for the resumption of hostilities with Russia. Alexander was equally aware that the outbreak of hostilities may be imminent, and appointed General Mikhail Barclay de Tolly as Minister of War in 1810. Barclay de Tolly was a Baltic German officer of Scottish descent who had proven himself as a capable administrator and military thinker in earlier engagements. He embarked on a series of reforms to improve the fighting capabilities of the Russian army and developed war plans in the event of Napoleon's invasion.

In June 1812 Napoleon invaded Russia with 500,000 men. He sent detachments towards St. Petersburg and Ukraine, but his main force was directed at Moscow. Barclay was appointed commander-in-chief of the 120,000 strong First Western Army and assumed de facto command of the entire army. Prince Pyotr Bagration's Second Western Army of 40,000 men was also deployed on Russia's western borders, but Barclay recognized that he could not fight when outnumbered to such a great extent. Accordingly, Barclay pursued a defensive scorched earth campaign, drawing Napoleon's armies deeper into the heart of Russia. However, Barclay's strategy opposed by Bagration and much of the Russian command. After abandoning the city of Smolensk to Napoleon after a fierce two-day battle, Barclay was superseded in command by Field Marshal Kutuzov. Kutuzov fought an

impressive battle against Napoleon at Borodino at the end of August, but was forced to fall back. At a council of war in the village of Fili outside Moscow, Kutuzov made the fateful decision to abandon Moscow to Napoleon. The conqueror sat in the Kremlin expecting Alexander to come to terms, but the Russian monarch refused to answer Napoleon's letters. Meanwhile, Moscow was set on fire – either purposefully or accidentally – preventing the Grande Armée from taking up winter quarters. Once the snow began to fall in October, Napoleon was forced to abandon Moscow to search for supplies in the fertile south.

Kutuzov's army intercepted Napoleon's march at Maloyaroslavets and forced him to turn back. The images of the remnants of the Grande Armée succumbing to the bitter cold of the Russian winter are a familiar feature of the 1812 campaign. The Russian army continued its pursuit of the French into 1813. Kutuzov liberated a host of German and Polish cities from French rule but succumbed to illness and died in May 1813, succeeded eventually by Barclay de Tolly. Meanwhile, Alexander employed his considerable diplomatic charm to persuade Prussia and Austria to join an alliance aiming to overthrow Napoleon. The allies formed three major armies: the Army of Bohemia under the command of Austrian Field Marshal Karl Philipp von Schwarzenberg, Prussian Field Marshal Gebhard Lebrecht von Blucher's Army of Silesia, and the Army of the North under the command of Crown Prince Karl Johann of Sweden, who had previously served in Napoleon's army as Marshal Jean Bernadotte. While the French Emperor demonstrated considerable tenacity, he was considerably outnumbered by the allies and was defeated at the Battle of Leipzig in November 1813. By the following spring, the coalition armies flooded over the eastern borders of France and captured Paris. Napoleon's marshals advised him to abdicate the throne. After futile efforts at resistance, Napoleon signed the abdication and was exiled to the Mediterranean island of Elba. Louis XVIII, brother of the executed Louis XVI, became King of France.

As the coalition armies conquered their way through Europe, Alexander joined the armies on campaign together with Emperor Franz I of Austria and King Friedrich Wilhelm III of Prussia. In addition to discussions about military strategy, the monarchs deliberated over the future of Europe. These debates were formalized with the Congress of Vienna, which opened in the Austrian capital during summer of 1814. The key players during the Congress were Austria, Russia, Prussia, Britain, and France, represented by

Talleyrand, who became Louis XVIII's Foreign Minister. Alexander aimed to present himself as a magnanimous victor and did not wish to punish France. He also favored a liberal constitution in France to prevent it from to succumbing to revolution once again. However, Alexander's objectives were not completely altruistic and he laid claim to the entirety of Poland. The Tsar hoped to restore Polish statehood under Russian influence, but the Prussians and Austrians were uneasy about the westward projection of Russian power. Disputes over the future of Poland led to threats of war between the negotiating powers. Only when Napoleon escaped from Elba and was welcomed back in France did the powers at Vienna renew their alliance. The Duke of Wellington and Blucher's victory at the Battle of Waterloo in June 1815 forced Napoleon's second abdication. This time, he was exiled to the distant island of Saint Helena in the south Atlantic, where he would die in 1821. The Congress finalized its business at the end of 1815, resulting in a set of compromises between the great European powers. Russia was granted a significant part of Poland which would become the Kingdom of Poland, but others remained under Prussian and Austrian rule.

After the Napoleonic Wars Alexander's rule assumed a more conservative character, although efforts at reform continued. He granted Poland a constitution, and in 1818 he asked his advisor Nikolay Novosiltsev to produce proposals for a constitution for Russia, though nothing came of the project. As part of the effort to demobilize the army, Alexander embarked on a disastrous military colonies reform. This would keep soldiers stationed in colonies situated in strategic positions, and in peacetime they would be expected to work the land. Peasants from neighboring areas would replenish the colonies over time. Thus, soldiers were expected to become peasants and peasants expected to become soldiers. Neither group favored the arrangement and the policy was gradually abandoned. Alexander died in 1825 in the southern port city of Taganrog. The circumstances of his death are unclear, and some theories suggest that Alexander faked his death in order to quietly relinquish the throne. In the 1850s Siberian holy man named Fyodor Kuzmich appeared in Omsk and was identified with the Tsar, and subsequent generations of the Romanov family were brought up to believe that Tsar Alexander and Fyodor Kuzmich were the same person.

The true circumstances of Alexander's death may never be explained, but the Russian throne was left vacant in December 1825. Alexander's heir was his younger brother Constantine, who ruled as Governor General of Poland.

However, Constantine had married a Polish noblewoman and refused the succession, leaving younger Grand Duke Nicholas next in line. When Alexander died, Nicholas was not aware of Constantine's refusal and swore an oath of loyalty to his elder brother, only for Constantine to publicly renounce the throne. Eventually, Nicholas agreed to assume power himself. In the political turmoil that ensued, a group of radical and liberal officers refused to swear an oath to Nicholas, shouting "Constantine and Constitution." Nicholas was unwilling to give orders to suppress the rebellion, fearing that his orders to kill fellow Russian soldiers would not be obeyed. In an effort to diffuse the situation, Nicholas sent General Mikhail Miloradovich, Governor of St. Petersburg and a hero of the Napoleonic Wars, to talk to the rebels. A rebel officer named Pyotr Kakhovsky shot Miloradovich and killed him. Nicholas then ordered loyal troops to fire their cannons at the rebels, inflicting terrible casualties and dispersing the rebels. Five leaders of the so-called Decembrist Rebellion were executed by hanging. Another hundred or so were sent into Siberian exile.

Chapter 12 – Reform and Reaction

Tsar Nicholas I (1825-55) assumed the throne in inauspicious circumstances. The military justice and draconian punishments issued by Nicholas in the aftermath of the Decembrist Uprising foreshadowed his 30-year reign. Nicholas's rule was encapsulated by the slogan "Orthodoxy, Autocracy, Nationality," devised by Minister of Education Sergey Uvarov in 1830. Nicholas's commitment to Russian nationalism was reflected in the brutal suppression of a Polish uprising in 1830 which led to the removal of Poland's constitutional privileges. More than any other Russian ruler, Nicholas was the embodiment of Russian autocracy. He concentrated power into His Majesty's Own Chancellery, whose officers were directly responsible to the Tsar. The work of Nicholas's Chancellery had some positive outcomes. The Second Section was responsible for legislation and headed by Mikhail Speransky, Alexander I's former chief secretary who had been exiled to Siberia in 1812. Speransky gradually returned to favor and as Governor of Siberia successfully reorganized the regional government of the vast territory. Nicholas invited him back to St. Petersburg to preside over the codification of Russia's laws. This monumental task was completed in 1830. An edited collection of 46 volumes appeared in 1835 and served as Russia's primary legal code. The more notorious element of the Chancellery was its Third Section, responsible for policing and security. Under the leadership of Alexander Benckendorff, the Third Section monitored the empire for political dissent. Liberal opponents of the regime such as Alexander Herzen described Russia under Nicholas as a police state.

Despite the sinister nature of his political rule, Nicholas's reign also coincided with the Golden Age of Russian literature. Alexander Pushkin continues to be regarded as the greatest Russian writer of all time. Pushkin had written radical verses in his youth and was banished from St. Petersburg. From exile in southern Russia and later at his mother's estate of Mikhailovskoye, Pushkin began writing *Eugene Onegin*, a tale of unrequited love which served as a critique of Russian aristocratic society. Pushkin was investigated for his connections to the Decembrist Uprising – many of the leaders were close friends – but escaped punishment. Tsar Nicholas fully recognized Pushkin's literary genius and allowed him to return to St.

Petersburg. In order to temper the poet's radicalism, the Tsar acted as Pushkin's personal censor. Pushkin was more than a poet, and his literary output also includes prose and history. In 1836 he was appointed court historiographer by the Tsar and given access to the imperial archives to write a history of Peter the Great, but was killed in a duel soon after. Pushkin's untimely death in 1837 remains a great tragedy for Russian literature. Other literary luminaries of the era included Mikhail Lermontov and Nikolay Gogol. Gogol's short stories *The Overcoat* and *The Nose* played on the absurdity of the St. Petersburg bureaucracy. His play *The Government Inspector* satirized provincial bureaucrats as they fell over themselves to flatter officials from St. Petersburg. Although the conservative press criticized the play, Nicholas intervened to have it staged and enjoyed the performance. Corrupt imperial officials rendered the Tsar's government less efficient and Nicholas appreciated satire directed against lower-ranking officials.

Nicholas's conservatism at home was also reflected in his foreign policy. In the aftermath of the French Revolutionary and Napoleonic Wars, the great powers of Europe – especially Austria, Prussia, and Russia, aimed to suppress nascent national revolutionary movements. As imperial entities, Russia and Austria were keenly aware of the threat of national revolutions to their territorial integrity. In 1830 Nicholas brutally suppressed a Polish uprising and brought the Polish state under direct rule. He was reluctant to support the Greeks in their War of Independence from the Ottoman Empire, only doing so in the latter stages of the conflict. Nicholas was instrumental in the suppression of the revolutions of 1848 which engulfed the continent. The Austrian Habsburgs were faced with national uprisings in Italy and Hungary. The Hungarian revolutionaries managed to defeat Austrian attempts to suppress resistance and in 1849 established a government led by Lajos Kossuth. The new Habsburg Emperor Franz Josef I was obliged to request military support from his Russian counterpart. Tsar Nicholas obliged and the combined Austro-Russian army successfully suppressed the uprising.

Nicholas's reactionary foreign policy earned him the nickname "the gendarme of Europe." During the reign of Nicholas, the Russian Imperial Army continued to enjoy the reputation of Europe's most powerful army due to its contribution to the defeat of Napoleon. In 1853 Nicholas invaded the Ottoman provinces of Wallachia and Moldavia, threatening to upset the European balance of power. The Tsar hoped that his army's formidable

reputation would deter Russia's rivals from intervening in the conflict. These expectations were not realized and in 1854 Britain and France formed an alliance with the Ottomans to resist Russia. Crucially, Austria, which had recently been the beneficiary of Russian military assistance and was expected to support Russia, remained neutral. The British and French invaded Crimea and occupied several strategic positions on the island. The Russians fought bravely in defense of their stronghold at Sevastopol, but the besieging British and French forces finally took the port city in September 1855. Meanwhile, mentally and physically broken by reports of military setbacks in Crimea, Tsar Nicholas died in February 1855. His son Alexander II succeeded to the throne and sued for peace in the spring of 1856.

Tsar Alexander II (1855-81) recognized that defeat in Crimea was a national humiliation. In order to restore Russia's military capabilities, not only the army but the whole of Russian society had to be reformed. Britain and France were industrialized economies and had access to technologically advanced weaponry. Moreover, the British and French soldiers enjoyed political and civil rights and shared a sense of nationhood, while Russian rank-and-file soldiers were peasants with no great attachment to national issues. Alexander enjoyed a liberal upbringing under the tutelage of Vasily Zhukovsky, a romantic poet and close friend of Pushkin. In order to signal his liberal credentials, soon after his accession Alexander II granted an amnesty to the surviving Decembrist exiles in Siberia, enabling them to return to their homes and restoring their property. Alexander also believed that serfdom had to be abolished in order to stimulate agricultural and industrial activity. The Russian nobility was vehemently opposed to the abolition of serfdom since much of their wealth was tied up in serfs. In a speech to an assembly of nobles in Moscow in 1856, Alexander warned his audience that if the state did not emancipate the serfs from above, the serfs would emancipate themselves from below. Nevertheless, it took several years to establish the terms of the Emancipation Manifesto, which was announced by the Tsar in March 1861. The chief architect of Alexander's emancipation policy was Deputy Minister of Justice Nikolay Milyutin. A liberal reformer, Milyutin hoped to grant the emancipated serfs the land which they worked on. However, the nobles did not wish to relinquish the land without compensation and eventually the state agreed to buy the land from the nobles. The freed serfs were obliged to pay redemption dues to the state for a period of 49 years. Although news of the emancipation was welcomed with euphoria

across much of the country, this soon turned into anger and dissatisfaction once the peasants realized the scale of their financial obligations to the state.

In addition to the emancipation reform, which earned him the nickname of Tsar-Liberator, Alexander embarked on political and judicial reforms in Russian towns and the countryside. Now that the serfs became free peasants, the Tsar reformed local political institutions in order to give them political rights. In 1864 Alexander introduced representative village councils known as *zemstva,* which included representation from the peasantry. These new bodies were given extensive powers over taxation and issues such as education, healthcare and public welfare. Over the following decade they were introduced across the country. In 1870 trial by jury was introduced in lower courts throughout the empire. This was a major departure from the traditional judicial institutions which were controlled by the nobility. Alexander's jury system included a radical and unique feature whereby juries could decide that a defendant was guilty of a crime without applying any punishment. This was a major departure from the reign of Nicholas I when the letter of the law was supreme. Unlike the emancipation and zemstva reforms which were criticized for their inconsistency and unintended consequences, Alexander's jury reforms are widely regarded as a success and a significant improvement on the previous system of justice.

Although Alexander cultivated the image of a great reformer, he was criticized by radical and liberal intellectuals for pursuing half-hearted reforms. The emancipation settlement imposed a heavy financial burden on the peasants. Political and judicial reforms did not extend to the higher state organs. Alexander had no plans to introduce a constitution to limit his autocratic power. As a result, radical political groups continued to oppose the Tsar and made plans to overthrow the tsarist regime. Over the course of his reign Alexander was the target of seven assassination attempts. The first attempt was carried out by Dmitry Karakozov in April 1866, who blamed the Tsar for the suffering of the workers and the urban poor. The Tsar escaped unharmed, but the incident shocked Russian society. Russian monarchs had been assassinated before, but only in the context of palace intrigues hidden from public view. Karakozov's attempt was the first time a public assassination attempt had taken place. Alexander would survive five more assassination attempts but his luck ran out on 1 March 1881. The Tsar was returning from a routine military inspection traveling inside a bulletproof carriage when a bomb was thrown at the imperial vehicle by a member of the

terrorist group People's Will. Alexander was unharmed but the explosion had killed one Cossack and injured many others. He instructed the driver to return to the spot of the explosion and stepped out of his carriage. At that moment another assassin threw a bomb at the Tsar's feet, shattering his legs. The mortally wounded sovereign was taken back to the Winter Palace, where he died not long after.

The murdered Tsar's son and successor, Tsar Alexander III (1881-94), did not expect to assume the imperial mantle. His elder brother, Tsarevich Nikolay Alexandrovich, had been brought up as a liberal by Alexander II and was seen as Russia's great hope. In 1865, Nikolay suddenly fell ill and died, leaving his younger brother Alexander as heir. Alexander received little political education and the law professor Konstantin Pobedonostsev was engaged to instruct the heir in political administration. Pobedonostsev was an initial supporter of Alexander II's reforms, but his political views became more conservative over time. In the latter years of his father's reign, Tsarevich Alexander would emerge as the spokesman for the conservative opposition to Alexander II's reforms. When Alexander III assumed the throne, he pursued a nationalist policy. He was physically imposing and looked like a Russian peasant, despite being 99 percent German. His strength was legendary and at state dinners he would bend cutlery out of shape with his bare hands as a demonstration of Russian power to foreign diplomats. When he became Tsar, Alexander issued a manifesto which ended Alexander II's reforms. The powers of the zemstva were reduced, and noble land captains were introduced to preside over peasant communes. Universities became the subject of greater scrutiny as students were especially prone to espousing revolutionary doctrines. Alexander also presided over a crackdown of terrorist groups such as the People's Will. Nevertheless, radical revolutionary parties continued to operate underground.

Although Alexander's reign is associated with reactionary domestic policies, he did preside over reforms which led to accelerated industrialization and modernization of the Russian economy. These reforms are usually associated with Sergei Witte, who served as Minister of Finance between 1892 and 1903, but were initiated by his predecessor Ivan Vyshnegradsky. Witte encouraged foreign investment into Russia, which funded large infrastructure projects such as the Trans-Siberian Railroad. This project was especially close to Witte's heart, as he had served as Minister for Railways and previously worked in the railroad industry. Most of the funding for the

project came from France, which in 1894 signed an alliance with Russia in response to the expansion of the German Empire. The railroad would facilitate the mobilization of Russian troops from the depths of Russia to its western frontiers. As a result of these industrial developments, Russian GDP grew by an average of 10 percent per year during the 1890s. However, industrialization during Alexander III's reign came at a significant cost to the peasantry. Witte's industrialization was funded not only by foreign investment but also by increased taxation on the peasantry, who were already burdened with redemption dues. The Russian countryside experienced desperate famine at the beginning of the 1890s and incidents of peasants rising up against their landowners and burning their estates were not uncommon during the period. Although Alexander III's diplomatic ventures earned him the nickname The Peacemaker, he was to bequeath a fracturing empire to his son Nicholas upon his early death in 1894.

Chapter 13 – War and Revolution

Like his father, Tsar Nicholas II (1894-1917) was unprepared for the duties of Emperor of Russia when he came to the throne. Unlike his father, Nicholas was the eldest son and expected to inherit the throne. However, while Nicholas received a good education and was an intelligent man who mastered several languages, he was not invited to the deliberations of his father's Council of Ministers. Alexander III may have expected to reign for at least another twenty years, during which his son would gradually be introduced to matters of state, but he died in 1894 at the age of 49. Unlike his father, who exhibited a harsh and stern demeanor, Nicholas's was compassionate and sentimental by nature. Nevertheless, he would continue his father's reactionary nationalist policies in an effort to maintain his authority, which he believed to have been given to him by God. Nicholas's reign did not begin auspiciously. Shortly before the death of his father, Nicholas was engaged to Princess Alix of Hesse, who would become Empress Alexandra Fyodorovna. The wedding took place almost immediately after the end of the mourning period for the late Tsar Alexander. The shift from mourning to celebration seemed too abrupt and the royal couple were criticized for hurrying to the altar. More ominous were the circumstances of Nicholas's coronation in 1896. A large celebration had been planned at Khodynka Field to the northwest of Moscow, where a crowd of 500,000 people gathered in anticipation of receiving gifts from the Tsar. There was a panic that there would not be enough gifts to go around, resulting in a stampede which caused the deaths of more than a thousand people. The bloody start to Nicholas II's reign foreshadowed a bloody end.

Nicholas came to the throne at a time when there was significant opposition to the tsarist system of political rule in Russia. His grandfather Alexander II had been assassinated by terrorists, and terrorist attacks continued to claim the lives of imperial officials throughout the country despite Alexander III's best attempts to eliminate political opposition. Three distinct political groups emerged during the 1890s. The liberals, including Pavel Milyukov and Alexander Guchkov, called for social reform, economic modernization, and constitutional government. They did not pursue violent methods but aimed to persuade decision makers through the press. The populists, who would form

the Social Revolutionary Party (SRs) in 1902, catered to Russian peasants and espoused agrarian socialism, favoring the redistribution of noble land to the peasantry. Radical elements of the SRs carried out extensive campaigns of political violence throughout the country. Led by Viktor Chernov, the SRs were by far the most popular political party in Russia during the turn of the twentieth century. The final group were the Social Democrats (SDs), who were influenced by Marxist political theory and aimed to mobilize the urban proletariat to overthrow the tsarist regime. Key leaders of the Social Democrats included Georgy Plekhanov, Julius Martov, and Vladimir Lenin.

The political opposition to Nicholas looked for an opportunity to strike at the heart of the tsarist political system. On Sunday 9 January, a group of striking workers embarked on a procession to the Winter Palace to register their grievances to the Tsar about the behavior of factory owners. The workers carried religious icons and images of Tsar Nicholas and sang Orthodox hymns, including the imperial anthem *God Save the Tsar*. This was far from a revolutionary act, but a traditional procession of loyal petitioners who believed their father-tsar would intercede on their behalf. On the day of the march, Nicholas was absent from the Winter Palace and was staying at the Alexander Palace in Tsarskoe Selo. When the march was underway, the soldiers tasked with keeping order appear to have been intimidated by the size of the procession and began to fire. Many accounts describe the soldiers as Cossacks, but in fact most of them were soldiers of the elite Preobrazhensky Guards. In total, around 1000 men, women and children were killed, both from the initial rifle fire and the stampede that followed as the demonstrators fled from the scene. The events of Bloody Sunday sparked a series of strikes across the city which threatened to topple the government. Public confidence in Nicholas's rule was also diminished by setbacks in the Russo-Japanese War, which had been launched in 1904 to consolidate Russian colonial possessions in Manchuria and the Korean Peninsula. In May 1905, the Russian Baltic Fleet, which had made its way halfway around the world and was renamed as the Second Pacific Fleet, suffered a catastrophic defeat at the Battle of Tsushima. This was soon followed by a famous mutiny onboard the *Potemkin*, a battleship of the Black Sea Fleet.

As St. Petersburg was in the grip of political turmoil, liberal elements in Russian society attempted to persuade the Tsar to grant political concessions including a constitution and workers' rights. Nicholas responded that he would not grant a constitution under any circumstances. He seemed to be

keenly aware of his lack of aptitude for political leadership and proposed that his uncle Grand Duke Nikolay Nikolayevich be appointed military dictator to suppress the revolution. When the Grand Duke responded to the offer by telling the Tsar that he would rather shoot himself, Nicholas II had no other choice but to introduce the October Manifesto, which would result in the establishment of the State Duma, an elected legislative assembly which would vote on new laws. These measures were enacted in April 1906, inspired by Speransky's constitutional reform plans a century earlier. Radical deputies were elected to the Dumas, and they voted down the vast majority of the proposed laws. As a result, the first two sessions were quickly suspended and new elections called. The electorate was reduced for the elections to the Third Duma, resulting in a majority for conservative parties, including the Octobrist Party led by Alexander Guchkov. Guchkov maintained a close working relationship with Prime Minister Pyotr Stolypin and assisted reforms to the Russian agrarian economy between 1906 and 1910. The parliamentary experiment appeared to be working and enabling reform, but Stolypin fell out of favor in 1910 and was assassinated the following year.

Although Nicholas was confronted with many domestic political problems, by the 1910s foreign policy assumed greater importance in the political agenda. The Balkan Wars of 1912 and 1913 created tensions between Russia and Austria-Hungary. Russia supported the independence of the Orthodox nations in the Balkan peninsula while the Austrians hoped they would remain part of the Habsburg empire. When Archduke Franz Ferdinand of Austria-Hungary was assassinated in late June 1914, it brought Austria into conflict with Serbia, a Russian ally. The rival European alliances at the time brought the rest of Europe into the conflict, leading to the outbreak of the First World War in August. Although the Russian armies mobilized rapidly, it was ill-equipped and defeated comprehensively by German armies under the command of Generals Paul von Hindenburg and Erich Ludendorff at Tannenberg and the Masurian Lakes. The Russians were forced to fall back several hundred miles to more defensible positions and Nicholas decided to assume personal command of the army. This decision may have bolstered the war effort, but contributed to political disorder in the capital, which was renamed Petrograd. Despite the initial successes of General Alexey Brusilov's offensive against the Austrians in the summer of 1916, the political situation in the home front continued to deteriorate as efforts by civil society to support the war effort were undermined by the government as it

sought to maintain its autocratic power. The liberal leader Pavel Milyukov charged the government with treason or incompetence in its mishandling of the war effort.

In early 1917, hundreds of thousands of workers went on strike and staged demonstrations in Petrograd demanding better pay and working conditions. By February, the crisis threatened to overwhelm the government. The regime attempted to suppress the demonstrations by force but some regiments mutinied and joined the workers on the streets. Even the elite Preobrazhensky Guards defied their officers and raised the red banner of revolution. Nicholas failed to appreciate the danger of the situation until it was too late. He attempted to return to Petrograd from army headquarters, but the imperial train was stopped en route by striking railroad workers and forced to divert to Pskov. There he was met by leading politicians and generals who advised him to abdicate. Eventually, Nicholas decided to sign the abdication but nominated his brother Mikhail rather than his hemophiliac son Alexey as successor. Mikhail was enthusiastic about the prospect of becoming a constitutional monarch, but was persuaded to decline the throne until a Constituent Assembly could meet to decide on Russia's future. This effectively spelt the end of the Romanov dynasty, which had ruled Russia for 304 years.

Even before news of the Tsar's abdication reached Petrograd, a group of Duma politicians established a new government. It called itself the Provisional Government since it would take charge of day-to-day administration until the Constituent Assembly could meet at the end of the year. The Provisional Government was led by Prince Georgy Lvov and dominated by liberals, with Pavel Milyukov and Alexander Guchkov serving as Foreign Minister and War Minister respectively. Despite the fact that the workers on the streets were mainly socialists, Minister of Justice Alexander Kerensky was the only socialist minister in the Provisional Government. Kerensky also happened to be Deputy President of the Petrograd Soviet, a body representing workers and soldiers and dominated by socialist parties. The Soviet exercised a lot of unofficial power and effectively shared power with the Provisional Government. The army would only execute orders from the Provisional Government if they were sanctioned by the Soviet. This phenomenon of Dual Power hindered the government's ability to resolve the social and economic problems which led to the revolution. Nevertheless, the Soviet opted to support the Provisional Government, and many of its leading

figures would also take up ministerial roles in the government. Only the Bolsheviks, the radical wing of the Social Democratic Party, pursued a policy of unconditional opposition to the Provisional Government.

In July 1917, the streets of Petrograd were full of workers protesting the Provisional Government's decision to continue fighting the war. The crisis resulted in the resignation of Lvov and several of his ministers, but the Provisional Government was reconstituted with Kerensky as Prime Minister. In the following months, Kerensky effectively ruled over Russia as a dictator, undermining the Soviet in the process. He appointed General Lavr Kornilov as commander-in-chief and took steps to strengthen the army so that it could more effectively keep order in Petrograd. Within a couple of weeks Kerensky became jealous of Kornilov's growing popularity and became fearful that his commander-in-chief had plans to overthrow the government. The Prime Minister dismissed Kornilov from his post, but this merely encouraged him to order his men to assault the capital. Kerensky mobilized the Petrograd Soviet, including the Bolsheviks, to defend Petrograd from Kornilov. Kerensky's government survived, but the Bolsheviks were the ultimate beneficiaries. They had been suppressed by Kerensky a couple of months earlier but were now feted as the saviors of the revolution. Meanwhile, Kerensky lost the confidence of both the left and right and remained Prime Minister simply because the Soviet refused to overthrow him.

At the end of October, the Bolshevik Party finally decided to stage an armed insurrection to take power. As a result of their opposition to the Provisional Government, the Bolsheviks gained popularity and became the largest political force in Petrograd. Many senior Bolsheviks were reluctant to risk an insurrection, preferring to use the Petrograd Soviet as a vehicle to overthrow the government. Senior Bolsheviks Lev Kamenev and Grigory Zinoviev voted against the insurrection and even warned Kerensky in advance. Nevertheless, Lenin spoke forcefully in favor of an insurrection, which took place on 25 and 26 October. The main coordinator of the operation was Leon Trotsky, Lenin's charismatic second-in-command. The Red Guards under Trotsky's direction seized key strategic positions in Petrograd but failed to achieve their objectives not so much due to any resistance from government forces, but due to confused signals from the leadership. Eventually an assault on the Winter Palace was signaled by a blank round fired by the cruiser *Aurora*. The Red Guards stormed a side staircase, overcoming token opposition, before locating the ministers of the Provisional Government and

placing them under arrest early in the morning of 26 October. While the insurrection was still underway, Trotsky proclaimed that the Bolsheviks had taken power in the name of the Soviet. The October Revolution brought Lenin to the pinnacle of power.

Part 3 – Soviet Russia

Chapter 14 – A New Dawn

The October Revolution resulted in the creation of the Council of People's Commissars, the new government led by Lenin as Chairman. The significance of October lay in the fact that power transferred not to a coalition of socialist parties, but a single-party Bolshevik government in Petrograd. A Bolshevik uprising in Moscow was met with greater resistance but eventually prevailed. The Bolsheviks participated in the elections to the Constituent Assembly, but when it became clear that they would not win a majority and would be required to share power, Lenin gave orders for the assembly to be suppressed when it opened in January 1918. After meeting for twenty-four hours, the Constituent Assembly was forcibly closed by Red Guards and the deputies formed an alternative government in the city of Samara on the Volga. The suppression of the Constituent Assembly was a definitive moment when Lenin resolved to rule as a dictator, renaming his party the Russian Communist Party in the process. Although Lenin was persuaded in early 1918 to form a coalition with the Left SRs, the radical wing of the SRs which supported the October Revolution, the coalition fell apart within a couple of months. In August 1918 Lenin was almost killed by an SR terrorist named Fanya Kaplan, who attempted to assassinate Lenin because she believed he had betrayed the revolution. Kaplan was soon executed following interrogation by the Cheka, the secret police Lenin established at the end of 1917 under the leadership of the Polish communist Felix Dzerzhinsky to consolidate Bolshevik power.

As a further step in his consolidation of power, Lenin took steps to end the war with Germany. One of Lenin's first acts was to issue the Decree on Peace, which called for all warring nations to lay down their arms and make peace without any territorial annexations or reparations. The decree was a bold signal, but was not realistic. If Russia were to exit the war, it would have to come to an agreement with Germany. Trotsky, as Foreign Minister, was given the task of negotiating peace. The political turmoil in 1917 caused greater damage to the Russian war effort and the German army was within striking distance of Petrograd, which forced the Bolsheviks to relocate the capital to Moscow. The Germans demanded humiliating terms and Trotsky was hesitant to sign away large parts of territory. Instead, he attempted to

stall, expecting that Germany would soon succumb to socialist revolution itself and a peace treaty could be made on friendly terms. By March 1918, the Germans were running out of patience and Lenin gave Trotsky an unconditional order to sign the Treaty of Brest-Litovsk. Lenin recognized that defeat was a humiliation but was aware that it would buy him time to establish Bolshevik power across the country.

The Bolsheviks established the world's first socialist state and attempted to transform Russia according to their radical principles. Almost as soon as he became head of government, Lenin issued the Decree on Land which redistributed land belonging to nobles and transferred them to peasants. The government's commitment to eradicating privilege transformed daily life. The old distinctions of rank were completely eliminated so men and women would simply address each other as "comrade." Russia also looked and sounded different. Instead of the double-headed eagles of the Romanov Empire, the Bolsheviks adopted red flags and stars, together with the hammer and sickle. Lenin championed avant-garde art, which sought to break through the boundaries of classical art in the same way the Bolsheviks had broken the traditional political system. In terms of music, the solemn hymns of Imperial and Orthodox Russia were replaced by revolutionary songs such as *The Internationale*, the international anthem of workers which called for proletarian solidarity.

As Marxists, the Bolsheviks also attacked religious practices, which Marx famously described as "the opiate of the masses." The Orthodox Church in Russia was an institutional bulwark of conservatism and retained great influence in the countryside. In February Russia adopted the Gregorian Calendar which was in use in western Europe, breaking away from the Julian Calendar which continued to be observed by the Orthodox Church. The Bolsheviks pursued a campaign of religious persecution in an effort to undermine the Church, seizing the property of the Church on behalf of the people. In their pursuit of equality, the Bolsheviks initiated wide-ranging educational reforms. In contrast to the Church which provided only the most basic education to Russian peasants, the Bolsheviks hoped to educate the peasantry in order to encourage the spread of Marxist philosophy. Lenin introduced a reform to Russian orthography by which several letters which could be easily replaced by others were eliminated from the alphabet, thus simplifying the language. Within ten years literacy rates in Russia increased from 40% to 90%. The educational reforms were among the most successful

legacies of the revolution.

The radical transformations brought forth by Lenin did not meet with universal approval. Resistance to Bolshevism began almost immediately after the revolution. In the summer of 1918 the Czechoslovak Legion which had served in the Russian army during the war rebelled against the Bolsheviks after being forced to disarm. These experienced soldiers managed to defeat the Bolshevik Red Army in several engagements and occupied much of Siberia. They were approaching Ekaterinburg, where Nicholas II and his family had been imprisoned. Lenin feared that Nicholas would emerge as the rallying point for the White forces – conservative opponents of the Bolshevik regime. Accordingly, Lenin gave orders in July for the former Tsar to be executed together with his family, just a week before the Czechs captured the city. The successes of the Czech Legion enabled Admiral Alexander Kolchak to occupy much of Siberia by 1919. Kolchak captured Samara and displaced the rival socialist government and proclaimed himself Supreme Leader of Russia. In addition to Kolchak, the Bolsheviks were threatened by armies led by General Anton Denikin in the south and by Nikolay Yudenich in the northwest, which threatened to take Petrograd. While all these White armies made significant territorial gains against the Reds, they were eventually beaten back. By 1920 the major threats to the Bolsheviks were eliminated, and in 1921 the remnants of the White movement were evacuated from Crimea to exile in western Europe and the United States.

The survival of the Bolshevik government was far from guaranteed. Many expected Lenin’s regime to collapse within a number of weeks. The Bolsheviks initially abolished a permanent army on grounds of principle, but soon realized that it was necessary to maintain an army to confront the counter-revolutionaries. The Red Army was placed under the command of Trotsky, whose organization skills were second to none. Although Kolchak, Denikin and Yudenich had relatively few men under arms, they were highly experienced and supported by small contingents of foreign troops. By contrast, the Red Army was numerous but its soldiers were newly recruited and ill-disciplined. Had the three White armies successfully coordinated their actions, the Reds would have found it much more difficult to resist. Fundamentally, the Red Army won the Civil War due to geographical factors. Although the Bolsheviks occupied less territory than Kolchak, they controlled the main population centers, the majority of industry, and much of the transport infrastructure. This enabled the Red Army to recruit more men

and manufacture more weapons. Control of the railroads enabled Red Army divisions to move between fronts and take on the White armies separately. Trotsky forced former tsarist generals into the service of the Red Army by holding their families as hostages. In emergency situations such as the Civil War, officers with aristocratic backgrounds were welcomed by Trotsky in order to train the Red Army. The questionable loyalties of many of these officers would cause problems for the Soviet state a decade later.

Despite victory in the Civil War, Lenin's regime was far from stable by 1921. During the war the Red Army forcibly requisitioned grain from peasants in order to support the war effort. At the same time, they confiscated goods from the Church, ostensibly to buy food for the people. These policies outraged the peasants and alienated them from the government in Moscow. In 1920 and 1921 the Red Army was forced to confront a series of peasant uprisings in the countryside. Lenin believed that this was a far greater threat to the survival of the Bolshevik regime than the White armies. The crisis faced by the Bolsheviks was further underlined by the mutiny of the Kronstadt sailors in March 1921, who protested against the luxuries enjoyed by the political commissars under the Bolshevik government. This event was extremely embarrassing for Lenin. The Kronstadt sailors had been among the most vociferous supporters of the October Revolution and they were celebrated as heroes of the Revolution. The sailors also controlled the Baltic Fleet and could sail their ships to bombard Petrograd once the ice melted. Both of these key issues were addressed by Lenin at the 10th Party Congress in March 1921. He sent a force under Trotsky to suppress the mutinous sailors. The Red Army marched across the ice and bombarded the sailors with artillery, eventually forcing them to surrender. Meanwhile, at the Party Congress Lenin granted concessions to the peasants to pacify the countryside. He introduced a New Economic Policy (NEP) which introduced a limited market for goods. Instead of having their grain requisitioned, the peasants would pay a portion as tax to the state. This was a major retreat from Lenin's economic philosophy, but he understood the need to compromise in order to diffuse opposition.

After coming to power in 1917, Lenin and Bolsheviks struggled with the legacy of the Russian Empire. During the First World War, the Russian empire fragmented and several national entities declared their independence. As Marxists, the Bolsheviks opposed imperialism and believed in national self-determination. Accordingly, they quickly recognized Finnish

independence in 1918. However, Lenin also appreciated that the territories of the former empire were rich in resources. The Treaty of Brest-Litovsk was a great humiliation, but the defeat of Germany in 1918 rendered the settlement null and void. During the Civil War the Reds were inclined to defend the territory of the former empire, even if it was not ethnically Russian. In Ukraine, the Reds fought bloody engagements against Nestor Makhno's anarchist Green Army, while in Poland they waged war against Marshal Josef Pilsudski's army. By invading Poland, Lenin and Trotsky hoped to export revolution throughout Europe. The Red Army reached the gates of Warsaw in the spring of 1920 but was beaten back by the summer. Lenin once again conceded defeat and the project to export socialist revolution across Europe was postponed. In 1922, the government established the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR) as a solution to the nationalities problem. The USSR consisted of twelve member states, including Russia, each of which enjoyed cultural autonomy and some degree of political autonomy, although in reality, the government in Moscow made the key decisions. The creation of the USSR was inspired in large part by Josef Stalin, a Georgian Bolshevik who served as the first People's Commissar for the Nationalities.

Stalin became increasingly influential in Lenin's government after 1922. In early 1922 Lenin appointed Stalin to the post of General Secretary of the Communist Party. The newly-created post controlled appointments to party offices and Lenin saw Stalin as a key supporter of the NEP, which had been vociferously opposed by Trotsky. Lenin had envisaged Stalin as a useful subordinate, but Stalin effectively deputized for Lenin after the party leader suffered a stroke in 1922. He met Lenin regularly at the latter's dacha in Gorky, serving as the main conduit of information between Lenin and Moscow. Although he appreciated Stalin's support and loyalty, Lenin was critical of Stalin's manner and behavior in certain situations. He was infuriated when he heard that Stalin had insulted his wife, Nadezhda Krupskaya, in a telephone conversation. Lenin sensed that Stalin was becoming too powerful and sought to remove him from his post. He produced a document in the winter of 1922 which became known as his Testament, where he proposed changes to the structure of the government. He assessed the qualities of six leading party figures and concluded that if any single individual were to succeed him, the party would be split, with potentially serious consequences for the survival of the Soviet state. Lenin's Testament described Stalin as "coarse" and unfit for the post of General Secretary and

recommended that he be replaced by an individual who would share all of Stalin's qualities but would be "more polite and considerate to comrades." Lenin hoped that his testament could be presented to the 12th Party Congress meeting in the spring of 1923, but suffered a third stroke which left him unable to speak. Krupskaya kept the testament secret in the hope that Lenin would recover his facilities, but he died in January 1924. The bold visionary who led the October Revolution was dead. The party and the country had to decide how best to achieve Lenin's vision.

Chapter 15 – Terror and Upheaval

Lenin's death provoked an outpouring of grief across the country and in the Bolshevik party. The party leaders eulogized Lenin and hailed him for his visionary leadership. The city of Petrograd was renamed Leningrad in his honor. Against the wishes of his widow, the state decided to preserve Lenin's body in a mausoleum on Red Square. Despite Lenin's call for collective leadership after his demise, a struggle for power soon ensued between the members of the Politburo – the supreme decision-making body of the Communist Party. The highest profile Politburo member was Trotsky, whose contribution to the Revolution and the Civil War cannot be underestimated. However, Trotsky's popularity was a source of jealousy among his fellow leaders, who resented Trotsky for assuming a prominent leadership role despite aligning himself formally to the Bolsheviks as late as the summer of 1917. Stalin, Kamenev, and Zinoviev formed a political alliance to sideline Trotsky. The latter had been opposed to the NEP and therefore enjoyed less authority in the government. Trotsky was recuperating from illness in the Caucasus when he heard of Lenin's death and was absent from Lenin's funeral, while Stalin organized the event and served as one of the pallbearers. Lenin's Testament was made public, but Kamenev and Zinoviev protected Stalin while Trotsky stayed quiet. By 1925, Trotsky was effectively consigned to the political wilderness.

At the same time, Stalin began to advocate for a policy of "Socialism in one country," arguing that the Soviet state should work to establish communism within the Soviet Union before attempting to encourage global revolution. This placed him at odds with Trotsky, but the policy was also challenged by Kamenev and Zinoviev. By 1926 the political alliances began to shift as Stalin moved towards the right of the party, siding with Nikolay Bukharin and Alexey Rykov, both of whom were enthusiastic supporters of the NEP. Kamenev and Zinoviev regarded the NEP as a temporary concession to pragmatism but believed that the state should eventually impose direct control over economic life in the countryside, and now that the countryside was pacified the Bolsheviks should once again impose state control. They formed a United Opposition with Trotsky against the Rightists, but Stalin and Bukharin managed to defeat them in party debates. Although they counted on

support from old Bolsheviks, Kamenev and Zinoviev were encumbered by the fact they had voted against the insurrection in October 1917, and the Rightists managed to force them out of the Politburo by labeling them anti-Leninists. In the process, Stalin promoted several allies into the Politburo, including Lazar Kaganovich, Kliment Voroshilov, and Vyacheslav Molotov.

In 1928, Stalin abruptly abandoned his support for the NEP and proposed radical economic reforms which amounted to state control of economic life. In October he announced the first Five Year Plan which entailed the collectivization of agriculture, together with rapid industrialization, setting ambitious targets for industrial production. Stalin's sudden shift in policy took Bukharin by surprise. Bukharin defended the NEP and believed collectivization would destabilize the countryside. Once again, Stalin mobilized his loyal supporters in the party and expelled his erstwhile ally from the Politburo in 1929. According to official figures, the first Five Year Plan was a great success. Industrial output grew by at least 15 percent and at the end 1932 Stalin announced that the production targets had been met – nine months in advance. Industrialization transformed the Soviet economy. Industrial centers appeared in the middle of the Siberian wilderness. The population of the remote settlement of Magnitogorsk increased to a quarter of the million after the construction of steelworks which would make the city the main center of iron and steel output for the country.

Collectivization transformed the Russian agrarian economy beyond recognition. For centuries Russian peasants farmed individual strips of land. Under serfdom, the surplus produce was transferred to landowners, but under the NEP peasants could buy and sell any surpluses in local markets. Wealthier peasants, known as kulaks, would use the profits generated from these sales to buy land from their neighbors and consolidate their holdings. This made it economically viable to use agricultural machinery to cultivate the land. Stalin sought to end the practice of strip farming but was also opposed to the kulaks making profits at the expense of fellow farmers. The process of collectivization would create collective farms across the country. The peasants would work together to farm the land more efficiently and transfer a quota of their produce to the state. Initially collectivization was designed to be a voluntary process, but peasants throughout the country were so overwhelmingly opposed to collectivization that party officials usually had to coerce peasants into collectivization. By the end of the First Year Plan more than two-thirds of agricultural land in the Soviet Union was

collectivized. Although state control of agriculture enabled the government to allocate produce to the factory workers in newly industrialized centers, the quotas could not be fulfilled during times of poor harvest, resulting in widespread famine. In 1932-33 famine swept across country, claiming the lives of several million Ukrainian farmers alone. This has been referred to as a policy of state genocide, but famine affected the entirety of the USSR and the state was in no position to provide sufficient food for the whole country.

The horrors of collectivization were only one aspect of an increasingly brutal regime under Stalin. By 1930 the General Secretary had maneuvered between his political rivals to become the undisputed leader of the Soviet Union, and in the process he made many enemies. In the mid-1930s he pursued a campaign of terror to eliminate any potential threat to his rule. The terror began in 1934 following the assassination of Sergey Kirov, the popular head of the Communist Party in Leningrad. Kirov was Stalin's ally but Stalin seems to have regarded him as a potential challenger to his authority. Kirov's assassination in December 1934 may have been carried out on the orders of Stalin, but the evidence remains unclear. In any case, over the next four years Stalin ordered the NKVD (the organization which succeeded the Cheka) to arrest hundreds and thousands of party members, charging them with treason and complicity in Kirov's assassination. Among the high-profile victims of the purge were Lev Kamenev and Grigory Zinoviev, who were subjected to show trials in Moscow in 1936 which condemned them to execution. Two years later, Bukharin and Rykov were subjected to the same procedure. Bukharin denied the spurious charges against him for three months, but finally confessed after threats against his family and executed in March 1938. Among the members of Lenin's Politburo only Trotsky seemed out of reach in exile in Mexico, but in 1940 he was assassinated by a Mexican agent under Stalin's orders. The terror was pervasive and affected every level of social life. Children were encouraged to inform on their parents. Those who escaped the firing squad would be sent to gulags (labor camps) in Siberia. Many innocent individuals were condemned, and two heads of the NKVD – Genrikh Yagoda and Nikolay Yezhov, were themselves executed during the purge for their "mistakes."

The scope of Stalin's Great Terror extended beyond the Communist Party. During the Great Terror senior army officers were suspected of disloyalty and fell victim to the purges. Stalin had good reason to be suspicious of the political loyalty of the Red Army. The army was founded by Trotsky and

many commanders retained their admiration of his leadership. Furthermore, many officers had aristocratic backgrounds and there was a risk that in the event of war with capitalist enemies, these men would conspire with the enemy to overthrow communism. The highest profile army officer to fall victim to the purge was Mikhail Tukhachevsky, an intelligent military commander and theoretician who was the most talented officer in the Soviet army. Throughout the 1920s and 1930s Tukhachevsky was responsible for the modernization of the Soviet army's tactics and strategy in an era of mechanized warfare. Stalin begrudgingly recognized Tukhachevsky's talents and contributions and appointed him Marshal of the Soviet Union, the highest rank in the Soviet Army established in 1935. Tukhachevsky was a popular commander in the army and Stalin was anxious that he would launch a military coup, following the example of Napoleon Bonaparte who overthrew the French Revolutionary government. In 1937 Tukhachevsky was accused of plotting with Bukharin to overthrow the government and executed. His fellow Marshals Vasily Blyukher and Alexander Yegorov would also face the firing squad in 1938 and 1939 respectively.

Stalin's purge of the army was carried out in a period of increasing political tensions both in Europe and Asia. In 1933 Adolf Hitler was appointed Chancellor of Germany and assumed the post of President and Fuhrer the following year. Hitler's National Socialist (Nazi) Party was ideologically opposed to communism and regarded the Slavic peoples as racially inferior. The central theme of Hitler's ideology was the eastward expansion of Germany towards Poland, Lithuania, and Belarus, displacing the Slavic and Jewish populations to create *Lebensraum* – living space to provide for the prosperity of the German people. Consequently, Germany and the USSR could be expected to be at war with each other sooner rather than later. Stalin sought an alliance with France and the United Kingdom directed against the threat of Nazi Germany. In 1934 the USSR had joined the League of Nations, the international body created by the victors of the First World War to maintain the post-war international order. During this time the French and British were reluctant to confront Hitler and pursued a policy of appeasement and Stalin's diplomatic overtures were rejected while the British and French governments allowed Hitler to annex Austria and occupy Czechoslovakia in 1938 and 1939.

By 1939, Stalin's hopes of negotiating an anti-Hitler alliance were ebbing away, leading to a change in Soviet foreign policy. He dismissed his Foreign

Minister Maxim Litvinov and appointed his loyal subordinate Vyacheslav Molotov in his place. Stalin instructed Molotov to open diplomatic channels with German Foreign Minister Joachim Ribbentrop in an effort to receive guarantees from Hitler that Germany would not take up arms against the USSR. The change of personnel allowed Stalin greater control over negotiations since Litvinov had openly advocated for an anti-Hitler alliance, while Molotov was prepared to carry out Stalin's orders. Molotov continued negotiations with Britain and France, but failed to come to an agreement after talks in August. The British and French were concerned about the prospect of the Red Army operating in Poland, and believed that the Soviets would not be faithful allies, while the Soviets were disappointed by the numbers of troops the British and French were willing to contribute to the cause. Molotov adjourned the talks with Britain and France and instead came to an understanding with Germany, which was finalized on 24 August 1939. Under the terms of the Molotov-Ribbentrop Non-Aggression Pact, Germany and the USSR committed to avoid war against each other for ten years. The agreement included secret clauses in which Poland would be divided between Germany and the USSR. News of the Nazi-Soviet rapprochement shocked European political observers, who were unaware that the two powers were engaged in secret negotiations. On 1 September, Hitler invaded Poland, provoking Britain and France into declaring war against Germany and marking the beginning of the Second World War. Two weeks later Soviet armies joined the invasion, and by the end of the month Polish territory was entirely occupied. Once Poland had been erased from the map by German and Russian armies.

The secret protocols of the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact also provided for the Soviet annexation of the Baltic states of Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania, which had broken away from the Russian Empire during the aftermath of the First World War and the 1917 revolutions. At the end of November 1939, the Red Army invaded Finland ostensibly for purposes of security, since Leningrad was a mere twenty miles from the Finnish border. The Soviets and the Finnish army fought for three months in a bloody war during the winter of 1939-40. The Finns defended resolutely behind the Mannerheim Line, a series of defensive positions constructed under the supervision of Field Marshal Carl Gustaf Mannerheim, formerly an officer in the Russian Imperial Army. When the peace was signed in March 1940, the Soviets made some modest territorial gains but sustained substantial losses. Estimates suggest

that the Soviets lost around half of their 700,000 men and a considerable amount of machinery. The Finnish army was half the size but only suffered 20 percent casualties. The lackluster performance of the Red Army, weakened by Stalin’s purges, informed Hitler that the Soviet Union was not an effective military force.

Chapter 16 – The Great Patriotic War

On 22 June 1941, 3 million German soldiers along an 1800-mile front crossed the border into the USSR and launched Operation Barbarossa, the codename for the German invasion of the Soviet Union. The operation was named after Frederick Barbarossa, a medieval German Emperor who ruled over much of Europe. Despite receiving advance warning from Soviet intelligence officers that the Nazis were preparing a large-scale offensive against the USSR, Stalin doubted their credibility and was surprised by the invasion. He forbade the Soviet army from returning fire. Once he realized the invasion was genuine, he sank into a deep depression, leaving the army retreating in disorder. German tanks advanced 200 miles in a week. When a group of political and military leaders met him at his dacha requesting orders, Stalin believed they had come to arrest him. Once he was persuaded that he was still in charge, Stalin ordered the army not to retreat a single step and decreed that anyone seen retreating would be shot. These orders worsened the strategic situation, forcing isolated Soviet units to fight to the death instead of allowing them to regroup to launch a counterattack.

Like Napoleon's Grande Armée before him, Hitler's Wehrmacht (the German Army) launched a three-pronged attack aimed at Leningrad, Moscow, and southern Russia via Ukraine respectively. Unlike Napoleon, Hitler designated an equal weight to all three fronts and aimed to strike simultaneously in three directions. Early in September 1941, the German armies were approaching Leningrad from the west and south, their Finnish allies by the north. The siege itself started in September, with all supply lines, railways and highways cut by the Germans on 30 August. The authorities had no time to evacuate civilians but some priceless artistic treasures from the Hermitage Museum were evacuated. Soviet counterattacks to lift the siege were unsuccessful and the siege would last almost 900 days. Leningrad was subjected large-scale air raids by the Luftwaffe (German air force), but the more dangerous threat to the lives of Leningraders was the constant bombardment of artillery shells. The city suffered from terrible food shortages. Only a small amount of the supplies could go through the blockade from across Lake Ladoga. The supply route would soon be known as the Road of Life. Despite the effort, starvation, diseases and shelling would cause the deaths of 650,000

Leningraders in 1942 alone. The composer Dmitry Shostakovich's Seventh Symphony vividly portrayed the siege and became a symbol of Leningrad's defiance against the invaders. The Soviet armies were determined to save Leningrad. It was a city of great significance, not only a former capital but a large industrial center and the base of the Baltic Fleet. Early in 1943, the Soviet offensives broke through the encirclement, which allowed more supplies to reach the shores of Lake Ladoga. But the siege was not lifted until January 1944 after a successful Soviet counter-offensive. As they retreated, the Nazis blew up important cultural landmarks including the imperial palaces at Tsarskoe Selo and Peterhof.

The German units sent towards Moscow traversed the same path as the Grande Armée more than a century earlier. In October 1941 Germans and Soviets clashed at Borodino, the site of the great battle in 1812. The Germans seized control of the battlefield and continued their advance towards Moscow. In anticipation, Lenin's body was evacuated to Kuibyshev (Samara), and the government made plans for evacuation but Stalin decided to stay put at the last minute. The task of defending Moscow fell to General Georgy Zhukov, commander of the Western Front. The advance of the German armies began to slow down with the onset of winter, but the Soviet Army was required to rapidly replenish its ranks following the devastating losses earlier in the summer. On 7 November 1941, Stalin held the traditional military parade in Red Square in honor of the October Revolution. 100,000 men of the Reserve Army marched past the Kremlin and to the strains of patriotic marches straight towards the front lines. Although the Soviet defensive positions were precarious, the Wehrmacht was encumbered by mud and ice and unable to operate effectively. The Soviet troops suffered the same privations but were better equipped for the cold weather. The German command ordered to halt the offensive in early December. Zhukov subsequently launched a counter-offensive which pushed the Wehrmacht back 200 miles, relieving Moscow from immediate danger.

In the summer of 1942, Hitler turned his attention south. His armies already occupied Ukraine and was pushing east. The ultimate strategic objective was to seize the oil fields in the Caucasus which fueled the Soviet war machine. The initial target was the city of Stalingrad, which was not only an important industrial center but located strategically on the lower reaches of the River Volga. The Wehrmacht began its assault on Stalingrad on 23 August 1942. Heavy bombardment both from the air reduced much of the city to rubble,

but the Soviets defended resolutely when the German 6th Army advanced into Stalingrad. The Germans were expecting to gain control of the city in short order but underestimated the tenacity of the Soviet defenders. Over the course of three months the armies engaged in fierce hand-to-hand fighting. One of the iconic symbols of Soviet resistance was Pavlov's House, an apartment building which managed to resist capture by the German forces for two months before it was relieved. The city bearing Stalin's name had great symbolic importance for both armies and encapsulated the brutality of the war. The city had been named after Stalin in 1925 in recognition of his leadership during the Battle of Tsaritsyn in 1920 during the Civil War. The Soviet Army could not envisage relinquishing control of Stalingrad to the Nazis.

In November the Germans reached the Volga, but the fierce fighting in Stalingrad had taken its toll. Zhukov devised an ambitious plan to attack the Hungarian and Romanian armies which were protecting the flanks of the German 6th Army. On 19 November the Soviets launched Operation Uranus, sending two groups against the northern and southern flanks of the invading army. The Soviets made rapid progress against the weaker Hungarians and Romanians and on 23 November successfully surrounded the 6th Army. Their commander, General Friedrich von Paulus, requested permission to break out and abandon the city, but Hitler gave orders to stand firm. The Soviets slowly encroached and closed the ring while the Germans were without food in the middle of winter. In February Hitler promoted Paulus to Field Marshal. Since no German Field Marshal had been captured by the enemy, Paulus was expected to fight to the death or commit suicide. He confounded Hitler's expectations and surrendered. He remained in Soviet captivity for the rest of the war, producing anti-Hitler propaganda and serving as an informal military advisor to the Soviet command.

The Battle of Stalingrad, which involved over 2 million men from both sides, was the largest battle in world history. It was also the turning point in the Eastern Front. The Wehrmacht were on the retreat and the initiative passed to the Soviet Army under Zhukov's command. The German military strategy had comprehensively failed. In July 1943 Hitler attempted to regain the initiative by ordering an offensive at Kursk. The offensive was well-signaled and both sides rushed reinforcements into the front. After a brief Soviet bombardment, the Germans began the offensive with artillery shelling, then infantry, supported by the Luftwaffe. The battle would become the greatest

tank battle in history. The Wehrmacht hoped that their tanks would overwhelm the Soviets and move rapidly into enemy territory, but they were held back by the Soviets fighting obstinately from their defensive positions. Five days later, the advance from the north was stopped. In the south, the German accomplished a little more. On 12 July, the Soviets launched the counteroffensive Operation Kutuzov and drove the Germans to their positions before the offensive twelve days later. By the end of the battle, the Soviet Army suffered greater casualties, but the Germans lost their momentum and would never regain the strategic initiative.

After its defeat at Kursk, the Wehrmacht was a shadow of its former self. By the summer of 1944, they found it increasingly difficult to replenish men and vehicles on the Eastern Front. To make matters worse, British and American forces landed in Normandy on D-Day, thus pushing the Germans onto a two-front war. Stalin had long requested the opening for a second front in the west from US President Franklin D. Roosevelt and British Prime Minister Winston Churchill. The Soviets launched an offensive to recapture Belarus shortly after D-Day. The operation was codenamed Bagration after the hero of the Napoleonic invasion. Operation Bagration was one of the best-planned strategic operations in history. On 19 June, the Wehrmacht faced an attack from the Red Army partisans from behind their lines, followed by massive air attacks two days later. On 23 June, Soviet armies moved forward and caught the Germans by surprise. Seeing that the German were ordered to stand firm, the Soviet pushed forward and left German units isolated in scattered pockets in hostile territory. The victory of the Red Army was remarkable. In early July, they retook the Belorussian capital of Minsk.

Operation Bagration took the Soviet Army into Eastern Poland. Although they were fighting on the same side, relations between the Polish resistance and the Soviet military were poor, since the Soviets had earlier invaded Poland under the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact. In 1940, the NKVD executed 6,000 Polish officers at Katyn and buried them in a mass grave. Although Stalin denied perpetrating the crime, the Polish government-in-exile in London suspected it had been carried out by the Soviets. These tensions encouraged the Polish Home Army to attempt to oust the Germans from Warsaw before the Soviets could. The revolt started on 1 August when the Warsaw corps, 50,000 men strong, attacked the German authorities. They gained control of Warsaw, but the Germans sent in reinforcements and bombarded the city for the next two months. The Red Army was across the

other side of the Vistula at Praga, but refused to provide any assistance to the Polish rebels. Moreover, they refused to let the other Allies use their air bases for airlifting supplies to the Poles. In October, the Home Army was scattered and forced to surrender when their supplies ran out. The Nazis flattened the city and deported Warsaw's civilian population. The Home Army was obliterated. This played into Stalin's hands. There would be fewer obstacles when the Soviets occupied all of Poland and installed a communist government.

The Red Army went through Poland to the River Oder, where they accumulated their fighting force in preparation for an assault on Berlin in the spring of 1945. The western Allies were only 60 miles away. There was little hope left for the Germans. Nonetheless, Berlin was putting up its last resistance. The Nazi Party recruited all men from 16 to 60 years old into the Volkssturm, their equivalent of the Home Guard. Inside Berlin, life went on. Shops were still opened, factories were still working. But there was an obvious air of fear and pressure and Nazi devotees were executing everyone they thought to be traitors and deserters. Artillery shells were fired into Berlin for three weeks and the 1,000,000-men strong infantry assault followed. The advance went slowly, street by street. But Berlin did not withstand for long. Stalin hoped to beat his Allies to Berlin, and sent his generals, Zhukov and Konev, to race to Berlin, which resulted in heavy casualties. Nevertheless, Stalin achieved his geopolitical goal. Hitler committed suicide on 30 April and on 1 May the Soviet flag flew above the Reichstag building. The German surrender was signed in the presence of British, American, and Soviet representatives late on the evening of 8 May. Due to the time difference, it was already 9 May in Moscow, and thus 9 May was designated Victory Day in the Soviet Union.

Victory over Germany marked the end of the Great Patriotic War, the USSR's struggle for survival against Nazism, but the Second World War was not over. At the Potsdam Conference in July 1945, the three leaders of the Allied powers – Harry S. Truman, Winston Churchill and Josef Stalin – met to discuss the future of Europe and the war against Japan. Stalin agreed with the western Allies that he would join the war against Japan. At Potsdam, President Truman informed Stalin about "a new weapon" which had recently been developed in the United States. The atomic bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki on 6 and 9 August, together with the Soviet invasion on 9 August, were motivating factors in Japan's unconditional surrender to the Allies.

Within a couple of weeks, Soviet forces swept captured Manchuria and the northern half of the Korean Peninsula, while American forces secured control of the southern half. The disposition of Soviet and Allied forces in Europe and Asia at the end of the Second World War would have far-reaching consequences for the rest of the twentieth century and beyond.

Chapter 17 – Cold War

The Allied victory in the Second World War saw Soviet and American troops exchange fraternal greetings, respecting each other for the hardships they had endured during the brutal war. Nevertheless, there remained significant ideological and geopolitical differences between the Soviet Union and their western allies – the US, Britain, and France. The Soviet Union had suffered greatly from the Nazi invasion, which cost 27 million Soviet lives. Stalin demanded territorial compensation, but the expansion of the Soviet state and its influence proved a concern to the western powers. The Americans and British proposed to rebuild the German industry to restore economic activity and facilitate the rebuilding of Europe, but the Soviets resisted the prospect of a resurgent Germany. As a result of their differences, the Allies divided Germany and Berlin into four zones of occupation. By 1948, the three western zones were consolidated into the Federal Republic of Germany (West Germany), while the Soviet zone became the German Democratic Republic (East Germany). The division of Germany between western and Soviet influence was mirrored in Europe. Already in 1946, Winston Churchill remarked in a speech at Fulton, Missouri, “from Stettin in the Baltic to Trieste in the Adriatic an iron curtain has descended across the Continent.” The iron curtain came to describe the divide between the capitalist states of western Europe and communist Eastern Europe. The United States and the Soviet Union were thus engaged in the Cold War – an ideological and geopolitical struggle fought through regional proxies.

Tensions between Stalin and his erstwhile allies were also apparent in Asia. China had been engaged in a civil war between the Nationalist government of Chiang Kai-Shek and the Communist insurgency under Mao Zedong. The two warring parties cooperated to resist Japanese invasion during WWII but came into conflict once again. The United States supported the Nationalist government, and although Stalin did not openly support Mao, the Soviets provided the Red Army with a well-equipped base in Manchuria. By 1949, the Communists secured victory and forced the Nationalist government into exile in Taiwan. The Americans and Soviets also came into conflict over the future of the Korean peninsula, which was divided between a communist government in the north and a pro-western one in the south. The North

Korean leader Kim Il-Sung hoped to launch an invasion of the south to reunify Korea under a communist government, but Stalin was reluctant to support the venture. He eventually sanctioned the invasion in 1950, but envisaged that Mao's China would assist Kim if required. In 1950-53, the North Korean army supported by primarily Chinese forces and Soviet advisors struggled desperately against the South Korean army and their American allies. The momentum swung back and forth between the opposing forces, but both sides were eventually deadlocked and agreed to peace along the 38th parallel, the effective border before the war.

Stalin's health began to decline in the 1950s. In 1952, Stalin was informed by his doctor that his health was only getting worse and that it would be in his best interests to take things easy. The General Secretary was angry at this suggestion and ordered that the doctor be arrested. Fueled by paranoia, Stalin believed there was a Doctor's Plot to assassinate Soviet leaders and ordered many of Russia's leading physicians to be dismissed and arrested. On 1 March 1953, Stalin was found semi-conscious in his dacha after suffering a cerebral hemorrhage. When the members Politburo arrived at the dacha, they could not decide what to do and hesitated to send for a doctor due to Stalin's suspicions about doctors. By the time a doctor arrived, it was clear that Stalin would not survive. The Politburo leaders began plotting among themselves for the succession by Stalin's bedside. Stalin briefly regained his senses and sat up from his bed, leaving the audience horrified and afraid of reprisals. He soon fell unconscious once again and died on 5 March.

Stalin's death triggered a struggle for succession among the Politburo. He had eliminated all his political opponents and the survivors had all been his protégés. Having reached the summit of the Soviet political system through their loyalty to Stalin, they could not conceive of political life without him. The Politburo agreed that no single individual should assume the leadership and therefore separated Stalin's titles. Georgy Malenkov became Premier and head of government, while Nikita Khrushchev became First Secretary (rather than General Secretary) of the Communist Party. This system of collective leadership would not last long. The first person to challenge for power was Lavrenty Beria, the Georgian head of the NKVD. After Stalin's death he assumed the position of Deputy Premier to the ineffectual Malenkov. As head of the notorious secret service, Beria was viewed with suspicion and fear by the rest of the leadership. In a surprising move, Beria hoped to improve relations with the United States so that the USSR could receive financial aid

to rebuild its economy after the devastation of the Second World War. He was prepared to abandon the ideological struggle of the Cold War, and even allow the reunification of Germany. This position brought him into conflict with his Politburo colleagues, who believed it would undermine Soviet power. In June 1953 Khrushchev persuaded the party leadership to stage a coup against Beria, to which Malenkov reluctantly acquiesced. Beria was duly arrested by a group of armed officers under Zhukov's command and executed for treason in December.

Malenkov and Khrushchev shared power for two years following Beria's removal, but the former was dismissed as Premier in 1955 due to his previous association with Beria and succeeded by Nikolay Bulganin. Malenkov's dismissal signaled Khrushchev's ascendancy, although he would not assume the office of Premier until 1958. Although Khrushchev had been a loyal Stalinist, during his leadership of the party he gradually abandoned Stalin's legacy. In February 1956, he delivered a "Secret Speech" to a closed session of the 20th Party Congress attacking Stalin's legacy. In a four-hour address, Khrushchev criticized Stalin's dictatorship, arrests, deportations and his leadership during the war. The speech was a revelation to party members who had been accustomed to praising Stalin. Khrushchev attacked Stalin's cult of personality and initiated a policy of de-Stalinization. In 1961, Stalingrad was renamed Volgograd, and Stalin's embalmed body was removed from Lenin's Mausoleum and buried in the ground behind the mausoleum.

The Khrushchev era would be noted for relaxation of political control – many political prisoners were released, and artistic censorship was relaxed. He pursued reforms to the Soviet economy and the Communist Party. Khrushchev was concerned about food production and promoted the cultivation of corn in Ukraine and the Virgin Lands. The First Secretary's enthusiasm for corn resulted in the crop being planted in unsuitable lands and the policy was a failure. In urban areas, Khrushchev ordered the construction of apartment blocks to provide accommodation to the Soviet people. Although the Khrushchev apartments were considered poor quality and a blight on Moscow's skyline, they provided affordable housing for Muscovites and were popular at the time.

Khrushchev achieved some notable successes in the Cold War, especially in regard to space exploration. The satellite Sputnik was launched in 1957, a Soviet rocket arrived in the moon in 1959 and Yuri Gagarin became the first man in space in 1961. Gagarin became an instant celebrity and was feted

around the world, including the west. Khrushchev's rule is usually associated with a thaw which eased some of the tensions of the Cold War. He aimed for peaceful co-existence with the west and invited US Vice President Richard Nixon to visit Moscow in July 1959, making a return visit to the United States in September, thus becoming the first Soviet leader to visit the United States. Despite this ideal of "peaceful co-existence", the Khrushchev period did result in episodes of confrontation. In 1961 he approved the construction of the Berlin Wall to separate East and West Berlin in an effort to stop people from escaping to the west from the east. In 1962, Cold War tensions reached their height when the Soviet Union sent nuclear missiles to Cuba, which had fallen to a Communist revolution in 1959. US President John F. Kennedy ordered a blockade of Soviet vessels heading into Cuba and forced Khrushchev to the negotiating table. Khrushchev agreed to move the weapons, while Kennedy agreed to take American nuclear weapons back from Turkey. Eventually, a partial ban on nuclear tests would be signed between the Soviet Union, the United States and the United Kingdom in July 1963.

Khrushchev's reforms to the economy and the party apparatus were not universally popular among the party. There was a sense that after denouncing Stalin's cult of personality, Khrushchev was in the process of creating his own. Although Khrushchev did not terrorize the party like Stalin, he frequently promoted and demoted personnel and caused a sense of unease among party officials. In 1964 Khrushchev was removed in a coup led by Leonid Ilyich Brezhnev. Brezhnev had been a supporter of Khrushchev in the struggle against Malenkov and was elevated to the Politburo in 1957. However, as an old-school communist, Brezhnev was a critic of Khrushchev's split with China in the 1960s, and his decision to back down during the Cuban Missile Crisis. When he took power, he restored the title of General Secretary of the Communist Party and ended Khrushchev's reforms. The ousted Khrushchev was forced into retirement and died in 1971.

The Brezhnev period ushered in an era of stability. The Stalinist terror was in the past, as were Khrushchev's ambitious but misguided reforms. An active civil society developed in cities such as Moscow and Leningrad. Soviet citizens enjoyed sporting activities and holiday in the Crimea. For many Soviet people, Brezhnev's rule represented a Golden Era for the Soviet Union. Yet another aspect of the stability under Brezhnev was economic stagnation. By the 1970s, economic growth slowed to 1-2% a year. Soviet

state enterprises failed to effectively introduce new technologies to industrial processes. The economic slowdown led to increased black-market activities. Criminals bribed bureaucrats in their efforts to seek profit in this era of stagnation. Corruption scandals were common among party elites. Brezhnev's Politburo had access to luxury items imported from the United States which were restricted to state officials, while most of the population were limited to low-quality domestic products. Living standards continued to fall and by the 1980s the USSR was importing food from the USA more than ever. Earnings from energy export largely went to funding the military industry, especially after the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan in 1980.

Economic stagnation was accompanied by political stagnation. Brezhnev's unwillingness to remove party officials from their posts resulted in gerontocracy – government by the old. By the mid-1970s Brezhnev was a sickly man and incapable of exercising power effectively. The average age of the Politburo was over 70. Although many Soviet leaders recognized the political and economic problems facing the USSR, they were either incapable or unwilling to conceiving bold new ideas to address these issues. The policies of the ruling elite at the time were often compared with Stalin's policies. They were relied on central planning rather than market forces to determine prices. Although state propaganda continued to claim successes of communism, a growing chorus of cynicism emerged in the background. Political dissidents produced literature critical of the regime and circulated it in hand-copied form – a process known as *samizdat*. Brezhnev sought to censor this seditious literature and suppress political dissent.

The Brezhnev period saw a general escalation of the Cold War throughout the world. Over the course of the 1960s and 1970s American armed forces were engaged in battle against communist North Vietnam. Soviet and Chinese special advisors assisted the North Vietnamese which fought stubbornly against US forces and eventually secured victory in 1975. Meanwhile, the Soviets were actively trying to expand its influence in the Middle East, supporting the Arab states in Six Day War against US-backed Israel in 1967. The Soviets consolidated their grip on Eastern Europe in 1968, launching an invasion of Czechoslovakia to suppress the Prague Spring – a series of demonstrations in the Czech capital in support of Alexander Dubcek's reformist government. Struggles in Angola following independence from Portugal in 1975 constituted another element of the Cold War, and in 1980 Soviet troops invaded Afghanistan.

Despite these escalations, Cold War tensions were easing by the end of Brezhnev's rule as both the USSR and the USA adopted a policy of *détente*. US President Richard Nixon sought to end American involvement in Vietnam and initiate warmer diplomatic relations with both China and the USSR. In May 1972, Nixon visited Moscow to hold discussions with Brezhnev. The United States and the Soviet Union signed agreements to co-operate in protecting the environment and in space exploration. Nixon and Brezhnev signed the first Strategic Arms Limitation Treaty (SALT), where both sides agreed to limit their nuclear arms and committed to denuclearization in the future. The height of the détente process came in 1975 with the Conference on Security and Co-operation in Europe in Helsinki. Representatives from 35 nations, including the Soviet Union and the United States, signed the Helsinki Accords, which recognized the sovereignty and territorial integrity of participating states, as well as providing for human rights and national self-determination. The conference was a major diplomatic triumph for Brezhnev as it recognized the Soviet hegemony of eastern Europe, while the United States welcomed Soviet commitments to protecting human rights. Although the United States and the Soviet Union continued to clash on ideological grounds, the Helsinki Accords conveyed the sense that both the United States and the Soviet Union would continue to exist as sovereign states for a long time and the two sides had to establish dialogue to resolve their differences in the interests of global security.

Chapter 18 – Reform and Collapse

Brezhnev's health declined in the late 1970s and he died in November 1982. His immediate successor was Yury Andropov, a former head of the KGB who had only been promoted to the Politburo in May. As head of the KGB, Andropov had a reputation for pursuing harsh, repressive policies, but he promoted younger reform-minded politicians in the party hierarchy. Andropov soon suffered from serious ill-health himself and died in February 1984. Although Andropov indicated his preference for the 52-year-old Mikhail Gorbachev as his successor, his rival Konstantin Chernenko was elected General Secretary by the aging Politburo with Gorbachev as his deputy. Chernenko was already mortally ill and Gorbachev often deputized for the General Secretary in Politburo meetings. By Chernenko's death in March 1985, Gorbachev was widely assumed to be the natural successor and was duly unanimously elected General Secretary by the Politburo.

Mikhail Sergeyevich Gorbachev was born to Russian-Ukrainian peasants in Stavropol in southwestern Russia in 1931. He lived through the famine of 1932-1933 and both of his grandfathers were arrested on false charges. During the Second World War his native village fell under Nazi occupation. He received news that his father had been killed in action, before the family was informed that it was a case of mistaken identity. Gorbachev had high ambitions and entered the law school of Moscow State University in 1952. While at university, he joined the Communist Party and met Raisa Titarenko, whom he married in 1953. Although Gorbachev could have found positions in Moscow, he decided to move back to Stavropol with his wife. Thanks to the patronage of leading party ideologue Mikhail Suslov, Gorbachev rose up the hierarchy in the local Komsomol (Young Communists League) and the party organs in Stavropol. He became a member of the Central Committee of the Communist Party in 1971 and Secretary of Agriculture in 1978, succeeding Fyodor Kulakov, another political patron. In 1980, he became a full member of the Politburo at the age of 49. By the time he was elected General Secretary in 1985, he remained the youngest member of the Politburo.

When he became General Secretary, Gorbachev appointed reform-minded allies to his government including Nikolay Ryzhkov, who managed economic

affairs, and Yegor Ligachev, who was placed in charge of personnel. Gorbachev introduced an ambitious reform program to address the economic stagnation of the Brezhnev era. In a speech in Leningrad in May 1985, Gorbachev openly criticized the economic system and emphasized the need to reform. He made frequent visits to farms and factories across the country in order to talk to farmers and factory owners about their difficulties. In February 1986, Gorbachev gave a speech at the 27th Party Congress about the need for restructuring of political and economic system, transparency and openness. Gorbachev's economic reforms are encapsulated by the term *perestroika*. Perestroika (restructuring) started with the loosening of the state control on businesses, allowing farmers and manufacturers to choose their own products, quantity and pricing. This provided economic actors with incentives to make profits and increase production. Moreover, a new policy was introduced to allow limited co-operative businesses, leading to new private businesses. The state allowed for limited free-market capitalism which had not been seen in the USSR since the times of the NEP. Restrictions on foreign trade were also loosened as the bureaucratic system was restructured. Initially, Gorbachev also encouraged western investment, but later backed down and called for the businesses to be Russian-owned.

Gorbachev's economic reforms were accompanied by political reforms. In his speech at the 27th Party Congress, he called for "a new era of transparency and openness." Gorbachev's program of political reforms was introduced under the slogan of *glasnost* (openness). The slogan itself would mean more open and transparent in government activities. The media had previously been under the state's control and every publication was subjected to censorship. Criticism of party officials, whether at the village level or the Union-level, was shut down. Gorbachev saw glasnost as a means to replace the lower levels of the Soviet bureaucracy with a younger generation of reform-minded officials who would implement Gorbachev's economic reforms at the local level. But the policy soon brought light upon the harsh realities of the USSR – its black past and its present incompetence. The media became more open, people were allowed greater freedom of speech and censored books were more available to the public. Political dissidents were recalled from exile. In 1986 the physicist and dissident Andrey Sakharov was allowed to return to Moscow from internal exile. Most challenging of all, Stalin's numerous crimes came to light. Records of repressions and corruption were revealed. Bukharin was posthumously

rehabilitated and found innocent of the charges Stalin brought against him. However, the political openness championed by Gorbachev soon allowed critics to voice their opposition to Gorbachev's policies in public.

Another part of Gorbachev's political reforms entailed the democratization of the political process. In 1989, Gorbachev established the Congress of People's Deputies as the Soviet Union's highest legislative body. Gorbachev intended to introduce political representation to the Soviet political system. The new Congress had 2,250 deputies, 750 representing districts based on equal population, 750 representing districts based ethnic subdivisions and the newly-included 750 representing public organizations like the trade unions and the Academy of Sciences. While this body would be too large to sit permanently, the Congress would elect a 542-member Supreme Soviet which would serve as the permanent legislature, sitting for eight months a year. Elections to the Congress were held in March 1989 and marked a return of multi-party politics in Russia for the first time since the revolution. When the Congress opened on 25 May, it became the scene for passionate political debates. Members of the democratic opposition criticized Gorbachev for being too cautious in his reforms and called for the dissolution of the Communist Party. The democratic opposition's most prominent leaders were Andrey Sakharov, who had been elected to represent the Academy of Sciences, and Boris Yeltsin, a former ally of Gorbachev who was elected with 90% of the vote in his Moscow constituency.

When Sakharov died at the end of 1989, Yeltsin became the sole leader of the democratic opposition to Gorbachev. The same age as Gorbachev, Yeltsin had joined the Communist Party in 1961 and was the party chief of Sverdlovsk (Ekaterinburg) from 1976 to 1985. He was then summoned by Gorbachev to become Moscow party chief and a non-voting member of the Politburo. During this time, he was an outspoken campaigner against corruption in the party and clashed with Yegor Ligachev, who believed that glasnost had undermined the party system and risked the collapse of the Soviet Union itself. In October 1987 Yeltsin launched a bitter attack against Gorbachev at the Central Committee for failing to press ahead with the reforms. The incident led to Yeltsin's dismissal as Moscow party boss and his departure from the Politburo the following year. At the 19th party conference in 1988, Ligachev addressed Yeltsin and declared "Boris, you are wrong," which subsequently became a popular political catchphrase. Yeltsin's election to the Congress in 1989 marked his return from the political

wilderness. He was subsequently elected to leading positions in the Russian Soviet Federative Socialist Republic (RSFSR), establishing an institutional power base to challenge Gorbachev. At the 28th Party Congress in July 1990, he made a dramatic speech to resign from the Communist Party and called for Gorbachev's resignation in the process.

Gorbachev met with opposition from the right as well as the left. His economic reforms resulted in the increase in prices of basic necessities. The workers soon called for higher wages to pay for goods, leading to inevitable inflation. Meanwhile, as a result of glasnost, the Soviet people had greater access to the western world and saw the contrast between their lives and the lives of those in the western world. The public started to lose their trust in the government. These developments caused anxiety among Communist Party officials who believed that Gorbachev was undermining the state. In 1990 Gorbachev created the office of President of the Soviet Union to reduce his dependence on party mechanisms. In response to secessionist pressures in the Baltic, Gorbachev also brokered a new union treaty which allowed the soviet republics greater levels of national autonomy. This was the final straw for the hardliners who staged a coup in August 1991 on the eve of signing ceremony of the new union treaty. Gorbachev was on holiday in Crimea when he was met by members of Politburo and the heads of the military and security services who placed him under house arrest. The coup leaders announced to the media that Gorbachev could no longer assume his position due to ill health, and established the Committee of the State of Emergency under Vice President Gennady Yanayev to assume control of the government. Gorbachev could do no more than to follow events by listening to the radio broadcast by the BBC World Service. Meanwhile, Yeltsin rushed to the Russian White House, which was home to the Congress of People's Deputies. When the plotters sent tanks against the parliament, Yeltsin defiantly climbed onto a tank and talked to the soldiers, many of whom abandoned their vehicles and joined the resistance to the coup. The coup failed and Gorbachev returned to Moscow, but Yeltsin had established himself as the most powerful political figure in the country.

Before the August coup, the Soviet Union and the Communist Party continued to enjoy some degree of public support. Following the coup, the Communist Party was disbanded and outlawed, while secessionist pressures increased. These pressures were strongest in the Baltic nations of Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania, which began to claim their right to freely secede from

the USSR in 1990, having been forcibly incorporated into the Soviet Union during the Second World War under the terms of the Nazi-Soviet Pact. The first demonstrations were as early as 1986, starting from Riga and soon Tallinn. The Supreme Soviets of each Baltic States made their own language the state language again in early 1989 and the republics aimed for sovereignty. In August 1989 approximately two million people linked hands to form a human chain known as the Baltic Way between Vilnius and Tallinn, singing folk songs as a means of expressing their national identity. In March 1990, Lithuania was the first to declare independence, followed by Estonia at the end of the month and Latvia in May. Gorbachev attempted negotiations, but the Russian federal republic under Yeltsin proclaimed its own sovereignty in June 1990. The negotiations would change hands and fall to the new Russian republic. This threatened the Soviets and caused them to send the military in Baltic States in January 1991, resulting in the Vilnius Massacre in Lithuania and the Barricades in Latvia, in which hundreds of civilians were injured. It was only after the failed coup of August 1991 that the Baltic States were recognized as independent states.

The failed coup resulted in an exodus of national republics from the Soviet Union, as Moldavia, Georgia and Armenia also proclaimed their sovereignty. Gorbachev attempted to negotiate a new union treaty which aimed to establish a Union of Sovereign States. Once again, Gorbachev's attempts to preserve a form of union were hijacked, this time by Yeltsin. On 7 December Yeltsin met the presidents of Ukraine and Belarus in the Belorussian state dacha near Belovezh. The following day they signed the Belovezh Accords, which declared the dissolution of the USSR and the creation of Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS), a far looser association than Gorbachev had intended. Yeltsin fatally weakened Gorbachev's authority and the latter lacked the power to resist. The Russian government soon assumed all functions of the Soviet government with the exception of defense and nuclear energy, as ordered by Yeltsin on 19 December. On 21 December, 11 of 12 remaining republics (with the exception of Georgia) would sign the foundation documents of the CIS in Almaty, Kazakhstan. Gorbachev resigned the office of President of the Soviet Union on 25 December 1991. Less than an hour later, the hammer-and-sickle flag was lowered, this time forever, and replaced with the tricolor of Russia. USSR's seat in the UN Security Council was succeeded by Russia. Soviet embassies were changed into Russian embassies. The Soviet Union was formally dissolved on 31

December 1991.

The collapse of the Soviet Union came as a surprise to western observers. Although Gorbachev's political popularity plummeted during 1991, he remained highly respected among political leaders in the west. During his rule over the Soviet Union, Gorbachev's foreign policy was aimed at establishing closer relationships with western countries. The de-escalation of the Cold War would allow him to divert funds away from the armed forces towards his domestic reform program. In 1988 he announced the withdrawal of Soviet forces from Afghanistan, with Soviet involvement ending the following year. Moreover, Gorbachev actively sought out advice about free markets from western economists. For their part, western political leaders appreciated that Gorbachev was a man whom, in the words of UK Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher, they could "do business with." In October 1986 Gorbachev met with US President Ronald Reagan to discuss arms reduction at a summit in Reykjavik which led to a commitment to eliminate nuclear weapons within ten years. Gorbachev's most consequential foreign policy decision was to abandon the Soviet policy of intervention in Eastern Europe. As a result, over the course of 1989 a number of Eastern European countries, beginning with Poland, overthrew their Communist governments without Soviet interference. The Berlin Wall was dismantled in 1989 and the two Germanies agreed to unification in 1990. The collapse of communism in Eastern Europe and the dissolution of the Soviet Union in 1991 marked the end of the Cold War. Western observers gave Gorbachev credit for managing the transition to democracy largely without bloodshed, with the exception of the attempt to suppress the revolutions in the Baltic. With the collapse of communism, Russians and Americans alike anticipated a new era of peace and prosperity based on liberal democracy and free-market capitalism.

Conclusion

Following the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1992, a feeling of hope swept through the newly instituted Russian Federation. However, this feeling soon turned sour. Yeltsin's reforms to the Russian economy led to hyperinflation and rendered savings and pensions worthless. Yeltsin soon encountered opposition to his policies from the Russian Congress of People's Deputies, resulting in a constitutional crisis. In 1993 Yeltsin sent tanks against the parliament, which had voted to impeach him for acting unconstitutionally. The sight of Yeltsin attacking the very building which he so defiantly defended two years earlier was a bitter pill to swallow for many Russian democrats. By the presidential election in 1996, Yeltsin seemed likely to lose to his main rival, Gennady Zyuganov, leader of the Russian Communist Party. In order to stave off defeat, he made a deal with the oligarchs, a class of businessmen and former bureaucrats who profited from the privatization of state industries at the expense of the Russian people. Although Yeltsin won the election, he continued to be unpopular while the economy remained volatile. In August 1998 the Russian government had no choice but to default on its debt. For many Russians who were now destitute with minimal state support, the capitalist experiment seemed like a failure. On 31 December 1999, Yeltsin suddenly resigned from the presidency four months before the end of his term and appointed his Prime Minister Vladimir Putin as his acting successor. Putin won the subsequent election convincingly to become President of Russia.

Vladimir Putin was a relatively unknown entity when Yeltsin appointed him Prime Minister in August 1999. A former KGB officer who served in East Germany, Putin was an advisor to the liberal Mayor of St. Petersburg Anatoly Sobchak following the Soviet collapse. During the early years of his presidency, Putin seemed to continue down the path of economic reform. Putin's presidency has been characterized by centralization of power. He launched a campaign against the oligarchs by claiming that they were stealing from the Russian people. The most high-profile conflict was against Mikhail Khordokovsky, the chief of the Yukos oil company and the richest man in Russia. Khordokovsky was arrested in 2003 on corruption charges and the assets of his oil business were transferred to the state-owned company Rosneft, chaired by Igor Sechin, a former KGB officer and one of Putin's closest advisors. Putin's war against the oligarchs was popular, although

Putin supported the business interests of several oligarchs who were his political supporters, including Roman Abramovich, an energy magnate who bought Chelsea Football Club in 2003. Putin's actions courted controversy, but he presided over an economic boom. Rising oil prices boosted the Russian economy and Putin enjoyed approval ratings of over 70 percent. When he was forced by constitutional requirements to stand down from the presidency in 2008, he supported the candidacy of Dmitry Medvedev and became Prime Minister. He returned to the presidency in 2012 amid protests that he was seeking to become a dictator. Medvedev presided over a constitutional change which extended presidential terms to six years. As a result, Putin could serve as President until 2024.

Putin continues to court controversy and suspicion in the western world, especially after the occupation of Crimea in 2014. Alleged Russian state involvement in the 2016 US presidential elections has also led to a sense of unease, which was amplified following the attempted assassination of former Russian intelligence officer Sergey Skripal in England in 2018. Putin's centralization of power has caused many political commentators and historians to argue that Russia has an autocratic political tradition and is by nature suspicious of democracy. A closer examination of eleven centuries of Russian history leads to a more nuanced conclusion. Modern Russia, as a continental entity centered in Moscow, only began to develop in the 15th and 16th centuries. The attempts by grand princes, later tsars and emperors, to establish autocratic rule, were resisted fiercely by fellow princes and nobles. In order to get their way, sovereigns would appeal to the people in their capacity as divinely-appointed rulers. Such efforts were also reflected in Lenin and Stalin's appeals to the people over the party elites, and Putin's efforts to strip away the power of the oligarchs in the name of the people. Nevertheless, these attempts at autocratic government had their limits. Voltaire famously remarked that the Russian government was "autocracy tempered by assassination." Russian rulers throughout the centuries, however formidable they seemed, had to broker informal power-sharing settlements with magnates if they were to avoid palace coups. The tension between autocratic and oligarchic tendencies is a key theme that runs throughout Russian history but is by no means unique to Russia.

Another key thread of Russian history is the tension between Orthodoxy and pluralism. Russia is often seen as a conservative society resistant to changes in social values. Certainly, ever since the times of Prince Vladimir, Orthodox

Christianity was a defining feature of Russian identity. The influence of the Church in local education continued until the beginning of the twentieth century. Despite this, Russia has always been a multicultural and multiethnic state. The Russian Empire's expansion to the south resulted in the incorporation of large Muslim populations, while westward expansion resulted in an influx of Catholic believers. Jews and Buddhists have also lived in Russia for many centuries. Despite its reputation for conservatism, Russia has produced some of the world's most radical thinkers and innovators. These individuals included monarchs such as Peter the Great, but also revolutionaries in the form of Lenin and Trotsky. While the Soviet state exploited the religiosity of the Russian people to transform them into communist believers, it encouraged the study of sciences and the accumulation of secular knowledge.

Over the course of the past millennium, the Russian state has transformed from a collection of principalities centered in Kiev to a continental behemoth which straddles Europe and Asia. Russia's status as a geographical anomaly which is neither entirely European nor fully Asian has prompted efforts to create a uniquely Russian sense of identity. A quarter of a century after the collapse of the Soviet Union, Russia finds itself at a crossroads. In order to establish political legitimacy, Putin has borrowed the symbols of medieval, imperial, and Soviet Russia. In 2016 he unveiled a giant statue of Prince Vladimir the Great outside the Kremlin. He has sanctioned the cult of Nicholas II and has provided the Russian Orthodox Church with a prominent role in social life. At the same time, he continues to pay tribute to the Soviet legacy and considers the victory against Nazi Germany as one of the great legacies of the Soviet state. In Moscow's Red Square the skyline is shared by imperial eagles and communist red stars. Although Putin appears to have established a stable government based on conservatism and nationalism, the tensions that have determined the course of Russian history continue under the surface. It is difficult for anyone to predict the course of Russia's future, but it is likely to be as dramatic as its past.

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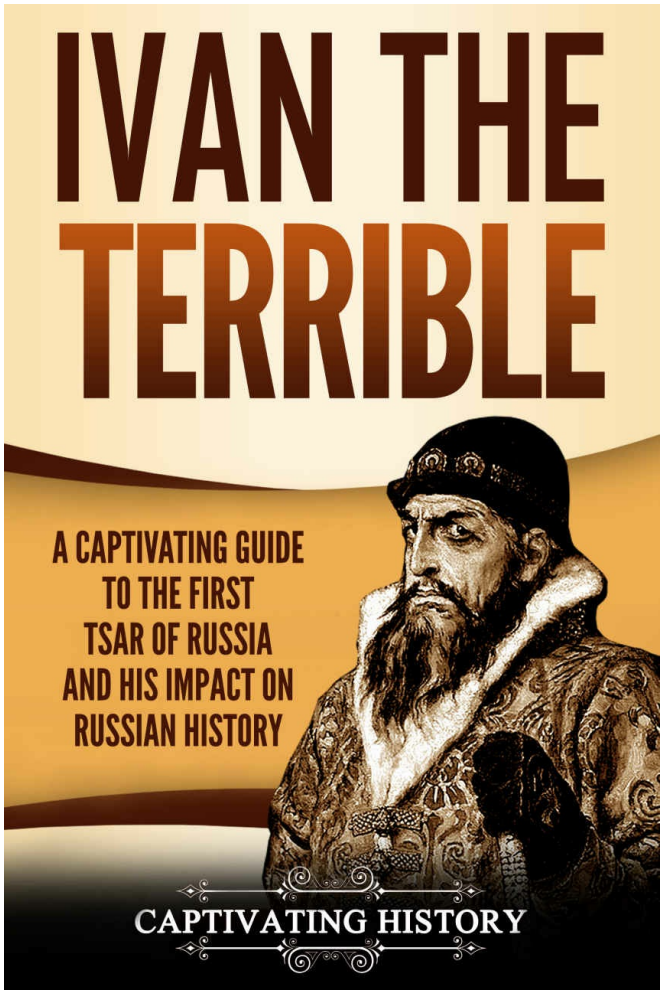
Part 2: Ivan the Terrible

A Captivating Guide to the First Tsar of Russia and His Impact on Russian History


IVAN THE TERRIBLE
A CAPTIVATING GUIDE TO THE FIRST TSAR OF RUSSIA AND HIS IMPACT ON RUSSIAN HISTORY
CAPTIVATING HISTORY

roduction

Considering that he has gone down in history as Ivan the Terrible, the first tsar of Russia could hardly have been a Boy Scout. As his name suggests, Ivan had an utterly terrifying presence during his thirty-seven-year-long reign.

Starting with his first execution at the tender age of thirteen when he had a nobleman thrown into a cage full of starving dogs and watched as the man was ripped to pieces, Ivan has had a reputation for brutality that is founded in horrifying truth. He massacred an entire city, poisoned his own wife, tortured small animals, and killed thousands of innocent people in frighteningly cruel and unusual ways. Peasants or nobles, family or strangers—Ivan cared little as long as he could kill. He married eight wives, raped hundreds of other women, and abdicated his responsibilities not once but twice. The first time he returned only when he was granted absolute power, and he abused it viciously by forming the terrifying *Oprichniki*, a regiment of ruthless horsemen who murdered anyone that stood in Ivan's way. The second time, he placed an enemy general on the throne and worshiped him for a year before ousting him and taking back his position as tsar.

Ivan's wild actions have led scholars and historians to label him as a psychopath and a deeply disturbed individual. There is no disputing the fact that Ivan's mental health was questionable at best. It would be all too easy to call him a monster, all too simple to believe that a human being could not have conceivably committed the heinous crimes that Ivan took such pleasure in. But once one starts to delve deeper into the psyche of one of the worst monarchs in all of history, there is more to see than just a cold-blooded killer.

Ivan's story is not only one of brutality, but it is also a tale of great suffering. It's the story of a little boy whose father died when he was just a toddler; a story of a child whose mother was poisoned when he was only seven years old. This was a boy who had to struggle to survive as the warring nobility threatened, molested, and harassed him endlessly while he tried to protect his only friend—his deaf and mute little brother. This is also the tale of a young man who was desperate for power to defend himself and found it when he was made the tsar. And it's almost the story of a good and capable ruler whose wild temper was soothed by the presence of a tsaritsa who seemed capable of calming the storm that was Ivan's mind; but, sadly, Ivan's beloved first wife was poisoned and died in agony, plunging him into a cauldron of

darkness and depression that produced the tyrant that has gone down in history as a monster.

He was not a monster, however. He was a man. And this is his story.

ıpter 1 – Russia Before the First Tsar

The Slavs, Finns, and some other tribes were in trouble, and they knew it.

Even though they had driven the Varangians out of their small towns and villages when they first arrived and briefly occupied their villages some years ago, some of the people were murmuring that things had been better when the tall Scandinavians had been in charge of their territories. They had arrived peacefully in their mighty longboats, these great, bearded men with powerful arms and warlike figures, which had been enough to scare the tribes. While the Varangians were peaceful, the Slavs and others knew that this was just because they didn't have anything to steal. Their lands, however, did. They were abundant and fertile, filled with treasures that the Varangian merchants could take and sell all over the world: beeswax and furs, honey and timber. Fearing exploitation, the Slavic people drove the Varangians out, and now they began to settle down to govern themselves.

Yet this proved to be more difficult than they'd expected. The unity that had bound them together in order to defeat their new enemies disappeared the moment the last Varangian longboat sailed back to the distant lands from where it came. As soon as they no longer had a common foe to fight against, they fell to fighting one another. By the late 9th century CE, the country of Russia was in chaos. Trade fell apart as the tribes couldn't agree on anything until a single solution came to the people: Get the Varangians back to unify them, this time in peace instead of in war.

When the Slavs and Finns from the land surrounding the Lovat and Volkhov Rivers realized this, they decided to take action. They sent a message to Scandinavia asking the Varangians to come back and govern them. At least, this is what happened according to the *Russian Primary Chronicle*, a selection of texts possibly compiled by the Russian monk Nestor the Chronicler in the early 11th century. Other sources suggest that the Varangians likely arrived and attacked Russia by force, citing Nestor's pro-Norman slant as reason to doubt his compilation. Either way, in 862, three Varangian brothers arrived in the area that now contains parts of modern-day Belarus, Russia, and Ukraine.

The eldest of the three brothers was Rurik. While many of the Slavic and Finno-Ugric peoples accepted him immediately as their ruler, others resisted, and Rurik took up his two-edged Viking blade and forged himself a kingdom in this new territory. With the backup of his Varangian soldiers as well as his

native allies, he forced his opponents back. Even the deaths of both of Rurik's brothers didn't stop him; he simply absorbed their territories into his own.

Rurik established the seat of his government by building a settlement that he named Novgorod, which translates to “new fortification.” Despite the fact that there were larger cities in the region at the time, it was in Novgorod that he would return to live out his later years. Here he finally settled, content with the kingdom that he had made for himself.

Little did Rurik know that one of his descendants would, hundreds of years later, sow utter terror through the very streets of the new city that he had just finished building.

* * * *

Rurik was the founder of the first great dynasty of unified Russian rulers. Before his arrival, Russia had been occupied for hundreds of years primarily by wandering nomadic tribes that lived off its vast and fertile lands without establishing any central government. These tribes included the people that were known to the rest of the world as the Scythians. They occupied the great steppes in the south and were a warlike people and renowned horsemen—in fact, the Scythians likely came up with the idea of castrating male horses, a practice that would revolutionize the use of horses both in war and in peace, as the resultant geldings were far more tractable than stallions without losing their strength and size.

It was ancient Greek merchants who would first stumble upon these tribes and connect them to the rest of the world via trade. Ancient Rome also had its stake in Russian dealings when Nero made some Russian lands part of his Moesia Inferior province, but most attempts to conquer Russia ended in disaster as wild nomadic tribes, such as the Huns, would invariably arrive. It was only in the 6th century that the Khazars would arrive and tame some of those wild steppes. The Khazars were a fairly peaceful people; they became Jews somewhere between 700 and 800 and drew much of their power from their alliance with the Byzantine Empire.

Rurik's arrival, however, ushered in a new era: that of the Kievan Rus'. After his death in 879, one of his relatives, Oleg, rose to power. Oleg's goal was to expand the territories that his late kinsman had amassed. He first set his sights on Smolensk, a city that functioned as a center of trade between two major rivers, the Dnieper and the Western Dvina. After successfully conquering it, Oleg headed for the bigger target of Kiev, located along the

Dnieper itself. The city had long been oppressed by the Khazars, who demanded high tribute from the Kievans; however, two men from Rurik's original band, Askold and Dir, had since overtaken the city and started their own reigns of terror over it. The men, true to their Viking origins, started to launch raids on the surrounding regions, using Kiev as their base. Nestor speculates that they might even have attacked Constantinople, the capital of the Byzantine Empire; either way, they wrought havoc on Kiev and its surroundings.

Oleg tricked Askold and Dir into emerging from the city and killed them both. Kiev was fairly welcoming toward Oleg and even more so when he persuaded them to stop paying tribute to the Khazars. Surrounding cities followed suit, and by the time of Oleg's death, he had expanded his lands to a large political federation known as the Kievan Rus'.

* * * *

Once Oleg had firmly established the Kievan Rus', the federation was cast into an era of turbulence and turmoil. Igor, the son of Rurik, became its next leader; he was greedy for wealth and taxed his people too harshly, ending up being assassinated by the Drevlian tribe. His wife, Olga, used trickery and violence to kill many Drevlians in revenge during her subsequent regency, going to incredible lengths in her grief and rage. She eventually abdicated in 963, plunging the Rus' into chaos. While her son, Sviatoslav I, succeeded in expanding the territory somewhat, he was assassinated on his way home to Kiev after a battle, and his three sons squabbled over the territory.

One of the sons, Vladimir, was forced to hide out in Norway as his two brothers threatened to destroy the Rus' and each other in their quest for power. While they fought, Vladimir amassed an army of followers. His marriage to Anne, the sister of Byzantine Emperor Basil II, provided him with a powerful ally. He returned, conquered his brothers, and took control of the Rus'.

Vladimir's rule proved to be a golden age for the Kievan Rus'. The predominantly pagan nation was converted to Eastern Orthodox Christianity, which brought more unity to the people, and Vladimir promoted education and the arts. Schools, cities, and churches were built, trade with the Byzantine Empire boomed, and when Vladimir died in 1015, he was known as Vladimir the Great.

His oldest son, Sviatopolk, briefly ruled the Rus' for four chaotic years,

murdering three of his brothers to cling onto his power. Another brother, Yaroslav, succeeded in deposing the bloodthirsty ruler, and he brought about another era of peace and expansion. Improving on his laws, borders, and relations with surrounding countries as important as Sweden and the Byzantine Empire, Yaroslav earned his title of Yaroslav the Wise.

Unfortunately, Yaroslav was the last great leader of the Kievan Rus'. His greatest mistake was made on his deathbed when he divided his territory among his sons, perhaps trying to avoid the grief and terror that fighting among his own brothers had caused him and his people. The move had the opposite effect to what he'd intended. Fragmented, the Rus' fell into a squabbling mess and eventually fell apart.

Its borders fractured, Russia was rendered instantly vulnerable to outside attack. It was overrun by the marauding Mongols in 1223, and while they established important infrastructure such as roads, their oppressive influence would last for decades. It was only in the late 13th century that a new dynasty would rise to power, and it would be brought about by a hero from the very city that Rurik had first chosen for his seat of power: Novgorod.

ıpter 2 – A Lineage of Heroes

Illustration I: Aleksandr Nevsky at the Battle of the Neva, a painting by Boris Artemievich Tchorikov

The frozen surface of the lake was still and smooth, coated in snow, but Aleksandr Nevsky knew that its appearance was deceptive. In reality, the ice's surface was uneven and treacherous—and he was counting on it.

He could hear the heavy breathing of his men and horses all around him. Already, ice jangled in the coats of the horses as they moved, their sweat frozen into their long, shaggy winter coats. Aleksandr knew that his own mustache was frosted as his breath steamed and hung in the air. He sucked in the smell of the sweating animals, of the crisp winter day, of the blood. They had fought hard already, and the hardest fighting was still to come.

Aleksandr's hope, however, lay in the lake before him. Once their Crusader enemies had put him and his army to flight—a purposeful retreat calculated

to lure them to a battlefield of Aleksandr's choosing—he had taken his swift cavalry and light infantry and fled out of sight, then led them across the creaking, popping surface of the lake. Aleksandr knew that lake like the back of his hand, and he was able to get his men to safety, picking their way across the treacherous surface. The ice at the very edge of the shore was broken and scattered, but the water was only knee-deep. His enemies, however, had little idea that the lake was even there. They wouldn't know about it until they were upon it—and that was exactly what Aleksandr was counting on. His retreat had been nothing but a calculated move to lead his enemies to the battleground of his own choosing.

There was a great roar from the white horizon. Aleksandr's men snapped to attention; he could hear their breathing increase, feel the heartbeat of his own war pony speed up between his knees where he sat on its broad, hairy back. The next moment, the horizon bristled with lances, the banner of the Teutonic Knights snapping and curling against the gray winter sky. The banner bore a yellow cross and a rampant bird, its beak and claws blood red and ready for battle. But it failed to strike fear into the heart of Aleksandr Nevsky. He had beaten the Swedes at the Neva, outnumbered as he was, in 1240, and he knew his army was larger than that of the Teutonic Knights; he was more than ready to face them.

A great horn sounded, and hooves crunched and thundered on the ice. The knights were charging. Forming a wedge shape, the Crusader army bore down upon the Russians, their horses snorting and laboring through the deep snow in their heavy armor. Aleksandr's lines held, but he heard the creak of bowstrings as his horse archers got ready for the fight.

The leader of the Crusaders reached the lake. Aleksandr saw his horse slip and falter, its hooves unsure on the ice. The lines of approaching knights ebbed momentarily as their horses hesitated at the unfamiliar footing then surged forward once more. But the hammer of thousands of hooves on the frozen lake made it creak and moan, the gentler sounds of its agony underlining the bellowing horns of the approaching army.

From the Russian ranks came the order to fire. As one, the horse archers let loose with their small, compact bows. Arrows arced through the air, a rain of devastation that crashed upon the knights. The clang of arrowheads on armor was not the only noise that filled the air now. There was a great splintering crack, and Aleksandr saw a horse simply disappear, a spray of icy water swallowing it and its rider as they tumbled through the ice.

They were not the only ones. But most of the knights had made it, despite their slipping, stumbling horses, and the Russian infantry had to brace themselves. Another volley of arrows flew from the horse archers, and then the knights had reached them. There was a great crash, and the Battle on the Ice had begun.

* * * *

Aleksandr Yaroslavich, born in May 1220, was just a nineteen-year-old kid when he won the Battle of the Neva against all odds on July 15th, 1240. His victory stopped the large-scale Swedish invasion of Russia in its tracks and made him an instant hero, earning him the new surname of Nevsky, meaning "of Neva." He had been born into a chaotic chapter in the history of Russia, then called the Republic of Novgorod. The Mongols had invaded Russia and sown terrible destruction throughout the country, and the Crusaders came close on their heels, bent on converting the Eastern Orthodox Russians to the Catholic faith of the Western countries. Still staggering from the blows the Mongols had dealt them, the Russians were hardly prepared for the Crusaders to attack their borders.

However, Aleksandr Nevsky rose to the challenge. When the Crusader army met the Russians on the frozen surface of Lake Peipus in 1242, it's true that many of the knights fell through the ice, but Aleksandr's tactics were largely to thank for the Russian victory that took place there that day. The Crusaders were thrown back, and to this day, the lake remains part of the boundary between Russia and Estonia. Aleksandr's victory echoes through the centuries.

This would not be his only contribution to history. His military prowess made him a popular leader with the people, and despite being a man of war, he made efforts to make peace with the Mongols even though this left the Republic of Novgorod paying tribute to the Mongolian leader, Sartaq Khan. Aleksandr's good relations with Khan eventually earned him the title of Grand Prince of Vladimir—the ruler of all Russia. And so began a dynasty that would produce many great leaders, including one who would be called "the Terrible."

* * * *

Aleksandr's oldest son, Dmitri, became grand prince after his father's death in 1263. This left little power for Aleksandr's youngest, Daniil Aleksandrovich, to inherit, but he solved this problem by founding the Grand Duchy of

Moscow, a new principality over which he would rule. Little did Daniil know that, over time, Moscow would grow to be bigger than its parent state of Vladimir, eventually becoming the most important duchy of Russia.

It was a Grand Prince of Moscow—Dmitri Donskoy, the great-great-grandson of Aleksandr Nevsky—who would eventually throw off the shackles of Mongol oppression, routing his enemies at the Don River in 1380. While Mongolia still required tribute from Russia, the Mongols now knew that they had to treat Russia with respect, and their oppression did decline somewhat. Dmitri's actions solidified Moscow's position as the seat of Russian leadership.

Four generations later, Ivan the Great would finish what Dmitri had started. Born in 1440, he was known as Ivan III when he took his place as the Grand Prince of Moscow in 1462. Despite the fact that he was still a young man when he ascended to the throne, Ivan had been a co-ruler with his blind father since he was just a child, and he would soon display exactly how wise his years of experience had already made him.

His first achievement was to annex Novgorod, which had been a separate republic previously. This started off a chain of conquests and annexations with Russia's borders being pushed farther and farther back until, by the end of Ivan's reign, his country was three times the size that it had been when he took the throne. Still, this was not enough for the prince. Every new town that he captured was another chunk of tribute that he had to pay the Mongols, and knowing that their power was already slipping away from them, Ivan knew that the time was right to break free of them once and for all. In 1480—ten years after conquering Novgorod—Ivan refused to pay tribute. Displaying his prowess as a tactful diplomat as well as a strong warrior, Ivan succeeded in establishing Russia's independence peacefully. He maintained good relations with the leader of the Mongols and piloted Russia safely into a new era of independence.

The greatest disappointment of Ivan's reign was the ongoing war with Lithuania. Despite the fact that Ivan had easily conquered many of the other regions bordering Russia, Lithuania proved difficult, which was not helped when the heir to the Russian throne rebelled against him. Ivan had decided to nominate his grandson, Dmitri, as heir to the throne, but Ivan's own son and Dmitri's uncle, Vasili, was deeply unhappy with this decision and became a rebel. He defected to Lithuania and threatened to cause further chaos for his aging father, prompting Ivan to imprison the innocent Dmitri and bring Vasili

back as the heir.

In 1505, Ivan III the Great died peacefully, and Vasili III became the Grand Prince of Moscow, despite the drama and chaos that had surrounded the succession. Little did either of them know that this would not be the last time that a Grand Prince of Moscow had trouble when it came to his family. As much as Ivan had been great, a second Ivan was about to ascend—and this one would be known not as the Great but as the Terrible.

ıpter 3 – The Birth of an Emperor

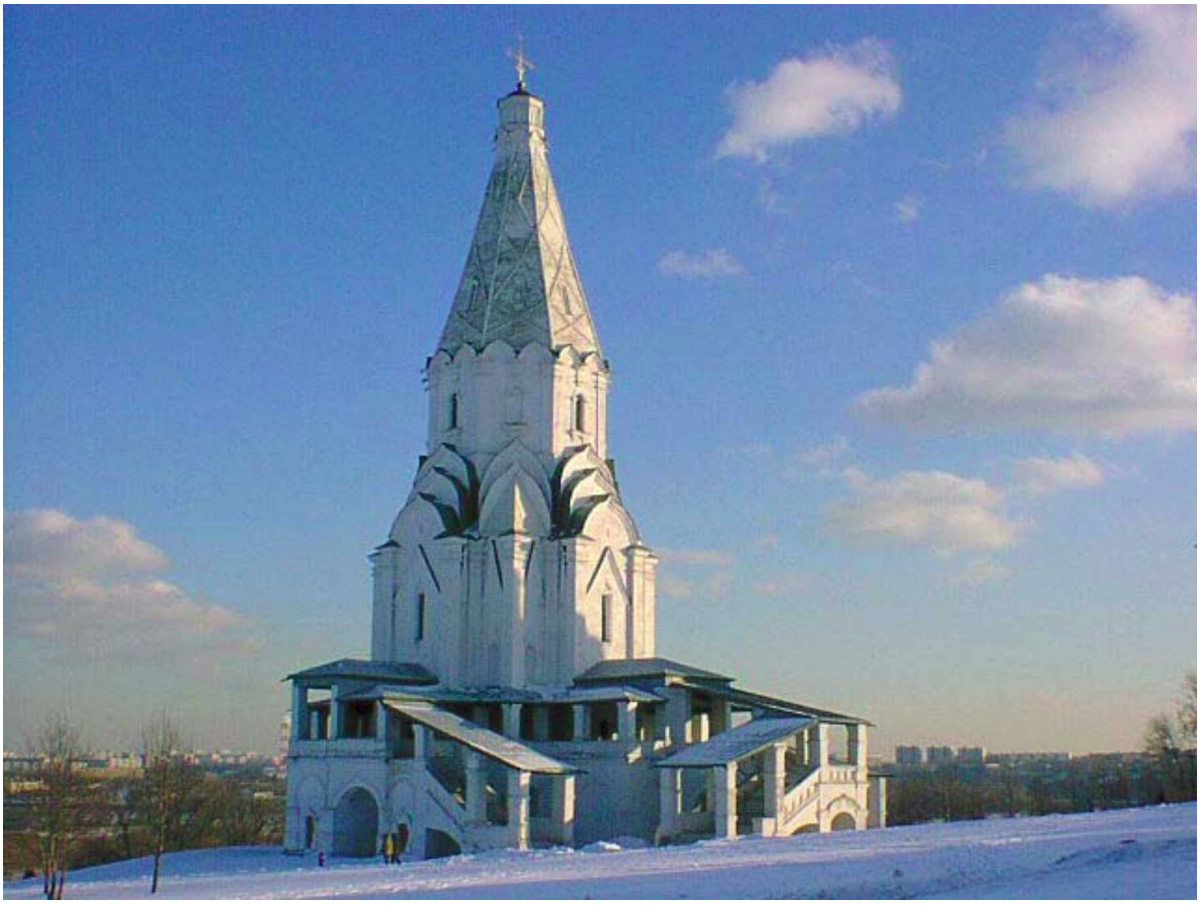


Illustration II: The Ascension Church in Kolomenskoye

Vasili III had been waiting for a son.

The son of Ivan the Great, Vasili had so far had a fairly peaceful reign as the Grand Prince of Moscow. Spending most of his time consolidating and firmly establishing the policies that his father had put into place, Vasili's uneventful rule would later earn him the mocking nickname of Vasili the Adequate. Yet one thing was missing, and it weighed heavily on his heart. Vasili was forty-seven, and he still had no son to whom he could leave the throne. He had been trying to limit the power of the nobility—the boyars—for most of his rule, but he was still horribly conscious that they were a selfish, squabbling bunch who mostly wanted to gain wealth and power for themselves. Despite Vasili's difficult behavior as a younger man, he was now trying to follow in his father's footsteps, and he knew that leaving the princedom to the chaotic boyars would be disastrous for the people.

The other option was for him to nominate one of his two surviving brothers

as heirs to the throne, but Vasili didn't trust them—although to be fair, he didn't trust anyone; his multiple executions of those nobles who dared to criticize him serve as evidence for his paranoia.

No, there was only one option for an heir: Vasili had to produce a son. And here was where the grand prince found himself failing. His wife, Solomonia Saburova, was no longer a young woman. Despite twenty years of marriage—as well as countless pilgrimages and other attempts to banish the curse of infertility that seemed determined to cling to her barren womb—Solomonia had never been able to conceive a child. Breaking tradition and even canonical law, Vasili divorced Solomonia and sought a younger woman to become his wife, eventually settling on Elena Glinskaya. She was the young and beautiful daughter of a Serbian princess, and Vasili was head over heels in love with her, even though at 47 he would have hardly stood a chance with her if not for his title. She was stunning, and Vasili decided she would be the one to produce his heir.

Despite the general disapproval of the population, Vasili married Elena among great festivities in the winter of 1526. Now, at last, there would be a son and heir to the throne of Moscow—or at least, so Vasili and his new young wife hoped. But the years began to slip past, and with every month that slid away from him, Elena's womb remained stubbornly empty, and Vasili's heart sank more and more. Would he die childless after all, leaving Russia to his irresponsible brothers and the selfish boyars? The people began to murmur that God had cursed Elena with infertility as punishment for Vasili's divorce of Solomonia.

At last, in the summer of 1530, Elena's belly began to swell and then to bulge. It seemed that Vasili was going to become a father after all, but whether or not he would have an heir remained to be seen; if this child was a girl, the throne would still be in a tenuous position.

Elena gave birth at last on August 25th, 1530. The thin cry of a newborn child rose into the air of the Kolomenskoye, the royal estate of the grand prince, and hope rang across all of Russia as Vasili prayed that his offspring would be a son. And it was: a little boy had come into the world, heir to the throne of Moscow.

Ivan was born to tremendous celebrations, the future of Russia secure due to his birth. To commemorate his birth, his father commanded a beautiful church to be built in gleaming white stone; this Ascension Church still stands

in the Kolomenskoye today, the oldest surviving structure on the estate.

For the first few years of Ivan's life, relative peace and prosperity characterized his existence. Doted on by his mother, Ivan was given only the very best that Moscow could offer. Two years after Ivan's birth, Elena bore him a little brother named Yuri; now Ivan had a little playmate too, and the toddler's life would have been picturesque on the majestic grounds of the Kolomenskoye, playing under the shadow of the very church that was built to commemorate his birth.

Ivan was only three years old when his life took a sudden and brutal turn for the worse. His father, Vasili, had seldom been home throughout Ivan's short life. The war with Lithuania that had started during the reign of Ivan's grandfather was still raging, and while Vasili's army had been able to capture the important strategic town of Smolensk, he still spent much of his time at war.

It was not in battle, however, that Vasili would fall. Instead, it was a hobby that would bring about his demise. Hunting was a favorite pastime for much of the Russian nobility. They often used birds of prey—a practice known as "hawking," although most Russians hunted with falcons—or pursued their quarry on horseback with hunting dogs. The elegant, curly-coated borzoi is a modern example of the hunting hounds that the boyars bred hundreds of years ago. Bears, wolves, and foxes were some examples of the big game that was popular for hunting at the time, but Vasili's favorite quarry was the hare. Riding his swift hunting horse, he could follow the hounds for hours, watching the tiny brown form of the hare skimming across the snowy landscape ahead of him as hounds, men, and steeds stretched themselves to their limits to catch up.

Hunting was Vasili's escape from the wars, politics, and everything else that plagued the mind of a grand prince. But it was also on a hunting trip that he would hear his own death knell.

* * * *

It was a perfect winter's day in late November of 1533. Vasili was only fifty-four years old, and he had ridden out with his retinue to go for a hunting expedition near Volokolamsk, about eighty miles from Moscow. Vasili's horse's breath steamed in the cold air as the big animal trotted through the snow, its slender legs sinking deep into the drifts as Vasili strained his eyes looking for the hounds. Where were they? He could hear their baying; they

couldn't be far from the hare now.

Vasili felt good about the turns his life had taken lately. While there was still not yet peace with Lithuania, at least he had two little boys and a pretty young wife waiting for him back in the Kolomenskoye, and now he was enjoying a perfect day's hunt, as carefree as the hounds that ran and barked across the snow. Despite the pressures of his position, Vasili was a little relaxed for once.

Then he felt it. A terrible, stabbing, blazing pain in his right hip, as if a hot poker had been forcibly shoved into his flesh. Gasping with pain, Vasili reined in his horse, trembling in agony. His retinue gathered anxiously around him, and the grand prince confessed that he could go no farther. He was in too much pain.

The nearest village of Kolp was only a short ride away, but by the time they reached the village, Vasili was doubled over his horse's mane, ashen with pain. He was hurried inside, and two German doctors were called to examine him. Tossing and thrashing, fevered and in agony on his bed, the grand prince fought for his life as the doctors rushed to his aid. They found an abscess on his hip, angry and swollen, the red welts traveling in all directions from the infected lump telling them that the infection had spread. Vasili had blood poisoning.

Even now, there is little that modern medicine can do for severe septic patients. Almost five hundred years ago, the doctors' hands were practically tied. They may have tried bloodletting, using a poultice of herbs on the abscess, given the grand prince alcohol in a bid to ease his pain, or they may have even attached fistfuls of leeches to Vasili's skin, hoping that the slimy creatures would suck the infection out of his blood. None of this worked though. Knowing that he was dying, Vasili asked to be taken back to Moscow and his family.

Vasili and his retinue made it back to Moscow on November 25th, 1533. By then, the grand prince would have been very sick, ridden with a fluctuating fever that gave him only brief respites before returning with a terrible vengeance. No amount of bloodletting could have ever helped him; in fact, if his physicians continued trying this treatment, he likely only grew sicker from the loss of blood. Yet nobody knew any better. Nobody could help him.

And so, in the middle of the night on December 4th, 1533, Vasili III Ivanovich perished in the city that he loved. Little Ivan was just a toddler, but already he

was no longer heir to the title of Grand Prince: he *was* the Grand Prince of Moscow.

ıpter 4 – Assassination

Vasili was buried in the Cathedral of the Archangel in Moscow, a magnificent, soaring building topped with roofs that glistened like gold in the sun. Wide-eyed, the innocent little Ivan would not have understood the great pomp and ceremony surrounding the burial. All he knew was that his father was gone—although considering that Ivan probably barely knew his father, this may not have had a huge effect on his young life.

Elena was a more important figure to Ivan. He had nurses and a governess who cared for him day to day, but Elena was still his mother, and she interacted with him every day, always ensuring that he was cared for properly. Her main goal, however, was to ensure that Ivan did inherit the throne that his father left him.

Vasili's two troublesome brothers were still around, and even though the late grand prince had succeeded in producing two sons before his death, they were determined to claw the throne out of his grasp somehow. Vasili had known that this would happen because of how young Ivan still was, and so, as he was dying, he transferred his throne not to his tiny son but to his young wife. She was to act as regent until Ivan was old enough to take the throne.

While not unheard of, it was fairly unusual for a woman to be a regent at the time. Elena found herself possessing far more power than most noble women could even dream of, and the boyars and Ivan's uncles were circling her like vultures, determined to get their share. If Elena was less of a woman, they might have succeeded. But they weren't dealing with just some princess. Elena wasn't a girl—she was a force of nature, and she was determined to keep the throne safe until Ivan was old enough to understand the mighty responsibility that fate had placed on his small shoulders.

* * * *

Elena Glinskaya was born around 1510, the daughter of a Serbian princess and a Lithuanian duke. She was only twenty years old when Ivan was born and twenty-three when the regency fell to her, but she refused to allow her youth or gender to stop her from ruling over Moscow with a stern hand.

Immediately, Andrei of Staritsa and Yuri Ivanovich—Vasili's two brothers—started to come up with plots to have Elena deposed. They were often backed by the boyars who were none too amused with having some Lithuanian woman on the throne, but Elena defended Ivan's throne ferociously. She had

Yuri thrown into prison only a year after Vasili's death; three years later, in 1537, Andrei followed, and both of them would die behind bars.

By that point, Ivan was seven years old and starting to become aware of his status as the soon-to-be grand prince. He watched as his extraordinary mother managed Moscow with aptitude and grace, unsurprising considering that she had studied politics, among other subjects, as a girl; now, she negotiated peace treaties with both Sweden and Lithuania, built a new wall around Moscow to fortify the city's defenses, and brought about a currency reform throughout Russia.

It would have been expected that Elena would merely protect the throne for a few years until Ivan could take it. Instead, she proved herself to be one of Moscow's most apt rulers, a grand princess who was far more than just a pretty face. Under her powerful influence, Ivan started his education as the young heir to the throne, and despite the fact that his father was dead, his future looked bright. With a mother like Elena Glinskaya, what could ever possibly stop him?

Meanwhile, the boyar families simmered with anger and hatred that Elena was holding onto power despite her husband's death. Two prominent families, usually involved in conflict between themselves, were particularly keen to get rid of Elena; the Shuisky and Belsky families had their sights set on the throne, and they would stop at nothing to get what they wanted.

Blissfully unaware of the trouble brewing right on his doorstep, Ivan was busy with his lessons with his governess, Agrippina Fedorovna Chelyadnina. Her first order of business was to get Ivan reading. Despite being very young and quite sensitive, the little boy quickly came to grips with the idea, and soon he was reading avidly. A widow of almost twenty years, Agrippina had been Ivan’s and Yuri's governess since Vasili died, and she was a figure almost more familiar than Elena was to the boys. It was Agrippina who fed, bathed, and put them to bed, who helped them with their lessons and got them dressed in the mornings. The boys knew her as almost a second mother. Little did they know that Agrippina was part of a terrible plot—a plot that would change Ivan's young life from comfort, luxury, and education to fear, neglect, and survival.

* * * *

Agrippina slipped through the dark hallways of the castle where she lived with her two young charges and their royal mother. Clutching a tiny glass

vial in her hand, she was aware of her pounding heart as she moved as light-footed as she could through the familiar building. It was snuggled safely in the heart of Moscow's Kremlin, but little did its inhabitants know that its threat came from deep within.

Nobody knows whether Agrippina was paid off for what she was about to do, if she had personal motives for her betrayal, or even if she'd been forced somehow. Perhaps she was threatened with violence; the Shuisky family was capable of anything. Either way, it is likely true that she moved through the castle on that dark night in 1538 headed on a deadly errand.

The details of that fateful day are vague and shrouded in the mists of history. One can only imagine how the morning of April 4th, 1538, must have dawned for seven-year-old Ivan. Did his governess wake and dress him like she did every morning? Had she already disappeared, and did he awaken late and sleepy to stumble half-focused to his mother's chamber? Did he find her there, cold and stiff, her body bled white of its vibrant life, her youthful eyes glassy and blank? Did he scream? Did he struggle to comprehend what was happening as he seized her cold hand, crying out for her to wake up? Did he sob as her attendants came running, and did he fight them as they dragged him away from his mother's corpse? Or perhaps Agrippina pretended that nothing was wrong. Maybe his day started like any other day until one of his mother's attendants discovered her, her scream of horror echoing throughout the entire castle. Maybe Agrippina slammed the door shut, keeping him in his nursery until some boyar could come and break the brutal truth.

Either way, with Ivan only seven years old and little Yuri not yet five, Elena Glinskaya was dead. She was probably poisoned, likely due to a plot of the Shuisky family who wanted to grab the power of the throne of Moscow for themselves. And because she had imprisoned both of their uncles (who had subsequently died in prison), Yuri and Ivan were immediately orphans.

Ivan's life took a sudden and horrific turn for the worse. His mother had been raising him to be a wise and educated ruler. But now that she was gone, Ivan's focus was on just one thing: survival.

* * * *

Elena was laid to rest in the Ascension Church, the very same one that had been built only a few years before to celebrate the birth of little Ivan. Then, he had been an innocent and uncomprehending baby, barely aware of the towering white monument that commemorated his birth. Now, still but a

child, he had to watch the body of his mother disappear into that church, never to be seen again.

Ivan now found himself almost completely alone. Both his parents were dead and so were his uncles, imprisoned by his own mother. Even Agrippina, the woman who had raised him, had been arrested and tried for Elena's murder. Now, there was no one left in the world who could care for Ivan and his tiny brother. It is hard to grasp how traumatic the death of Elena must have been for the two boys, especially Yuri, who was born deaf and had also become mute.

With Elena gone and Ivan still too young to take any kind of power, the regency fell to those same arguing, petty boyars that had probably killed Elena in the first place. The Shuisky family triumphantly took the place that they had made for themselves by murderous means, although they were constantly harassed by the Belsky family, their greatest rivals.

All of Russia suffered at the hands of these selfish boyars. Their only aim was to grab money and power for themselves; governing the country and serving the people were secondary concerns. With the two families so deeply at odds, Russia found itself neglected. The boyars oppressed the common people and helped themselves to whatever treasure or money they could find, regardless of who those things truly belonged to.

Nobody, however, could have suffered more than Ivan and Yuri. Caring for the little boys fell to the Shuisky and Belsky families, and they tossed this duty to the winds. Despite the fact that he was soon to be the Grand Prince of Moscow, Ivan found himself struggling to survive and as lonely as any street urchin in his country. The prince of Russia was going to bed hungry and wearing out his clothes, neglected and despised by the strangers that had suddenly overrun his luxurious home.

Sadly, the psychological effects of this time would be disastrous, not only for Ivan, but for thousands of people.

ıpter 5 – Becoming Terrible

Even though Ivan had his blankets pulled over his head, he could hear the fighting outside his doorway. Raised voices screaming at one another, metal clashing as swords were drawn. He squeezed his eyes tight shut, knowing what was coming next. There were screams of anger and incredulity, and then there was the thin sound of metal slicing the air as the men out in the hallway slashed at one another. Steel rang on steel, grunts of effort punctuating the heavy footsteps on the floor. Then a butcher's noise, the sound of flesh ripping. There was a brief gurgle of pain before the thud of a body hit the floor. Running feet echoed in the hall as some concerned voices stayed behind until finally there was a dragging sound as the fallen man was pulled away.

Slowly, Ivan let out the breath he'd been holding. He waited for silence to fall before pushing back his blankets and sitting up in bed. Just beside him, Yuri slept, blissfully unaware that anything had happened; he lived in a silent world so at least he could sleep peacefully. Ivan, however, heard it all, those terrible sounds of the feud between the Shuisky and Belsky families that had been raging within the very palace where Ivan lived for years. The warring families' constant battles often crashed up and down the hallways; often when Ivan ventured out of his room for the first time each morning, he would see fresh bloodstains that the maids had not yet scrubbed away.

Worse, sometimes the fights spilled over into the chambers where Ivan and Yuri were playing. It was a sign of the highest disrespect for a boyar to even venture into the princes' chambers, but with no one left to advocate for the boys, the boyars did as they pleased. They fought right in front of the children, sometimes even involving the boys in their fights, harassing and molesting them as Ivan struggled to protect his deaf-mute brother. Yet what could he do? He had been just a child when the feud first started. Ever since, no one had been safe inside the Kremlin that his mother had so carefully fortified before her death; even clergymen had been stoned to death within those walls. When the Shuisky prince attempted to overthrow the Belsky prince who was then in control of the regency, they had burst into Ivan's rooms and searched it noisily. Terrified, Ivan and Yuri cowered, convinced that the Shuiskys had come to kill them at last.

It was little surprise, then, that Ivan was growing up into a strange young man. Unutterably lonely with no one to talk to who could talk back, Ivan

turned to reading for companionship and solace. He read voraciously, educating himself as much as he could. Yet when he failed to understand something, his reactions could be irrational and violent; he often curled himself up on the floor and proceeded to bang his head on the cold surface, as if he could strike all the fear and pain out of himself and replace it with understanding and wisdom. He was slowly becoming an adult, but he was also already showing evidence of being profoundly disturbed.

As Ivan grew older, the boyars started to treat him with a little more respect. The people hung their hopes on the boy as being a fair grand prince someday; the Shuiskys, then in power, decided that it was easier and safer to keep him around for now than to kill him and risk an uprising. Neglect and molestation had failed to drive the young prince into madness, so as his teenage years approached, the Shuiskys decided that it would be best to simply spoil and distract him. They provided him with a string of young companions, usually noblemen about his age, and gave them all free rein to do as they pleased. Perhaps they could thus ruin Ivan and make him forget the power that was so close to slipping into his grasp.

Ivan seized upon this new opportunity for freedom with voracity. He flung himself into the same pursuit that Vasili had loved so dearly: hunting. But the steady calculation of a true huntsman was never part of Ivan's psyche. Instead, all he wanted to do was to inflict cruelty on his prey, the same cruelty that he had had to suffer for so many years as a voiceless child in the grip of the same family that had killed his mother.

Together with his reckless band of cronies, Ivan started to express his pent-up anger in terrible ways. Instead of just hunting the creatures that filled the woods surrounding Moscow, he captured and tortured them, sometimes pushing sharp objects through their eyes and sometimes casting live animals —often innocent, domestic ones, like pet dogs or cats—from the roof of the Kremlin. Pain and fear had twisted his young mind so that he enjoyed seeing others suffer. It made him feel powerful, stripping away the terrible helplessness that he had felt as a little child with nobody to protect him. And the more he behaved cruelly, the more the Shuiskys urged him on. They wanted the people to lose faith in their young prince and to see a side of him that would scare them.

As Ivan grew older, now turning twelve years old, his games started to get more and more dangerous. No longer were animals the only subject of his cruelty. With his buddies, he developed a new game to express his anger and

fear. Saddling up their horses, he and his friends would gallop madly through the streets, purposely riding through the slush to spray it up against people and carts and even steering their charging steeds directly into pedestrians to knock them over and trample them.

Ivan was becoming a rogue. But he was also starting to become aware that he had more power than he'd thought at first. He wasn't just a kid cowering under the covers anymore; he had the ability to control, to hurt, and to kill. And it wouldn't be long before the young Grand Prince of Moscow performed his first execution.

* * * *

Andrei Mikhailovich Shuisky lounged in the royal rooms of the Kolomeskoye, feeling exceptionally smug and content with his life. It was easy to see why. Five years ago, he had just been another boyar, another minor noble squabbling over petty things with other men of his rank; the previous Grand Prince of Moscow had barely paid him any attention. Now, he was in control of the throne of Moscow itself. He had thoroughly lined his pockets at the expense of the royal treasury and stripped most of the palace of its furs and jewels. Even better, he was lording it over all the people of Russia. If he ever wanted something, it was his for the taking, and a little violence was enough to get whatever he wanted. He even had Grand Prince Ivan IV firmly under his control. At least, so he thought.

The door to the chamber banged open. Shuisky jumped a little, not expecting any visitors. He was shocked to see none other than Ivan himself walk inside. The young man's eyes were so dark they were almost black; they glittered with something unreadable, but there was a definite menace in the way he walked into the room. He was flanked on either side by two of the royal huntsmen, and their hands were balled into fists, looking ready for a fight.

Before Shuisky could say anything, Ivan raised his hand. His eyes were locked on Shuisky's as he pointed. “Arrest him,” he ordered, his voice flat and expressionless.

The huntsmen nodded in deference to their prince and marched across to where Shuisky sat. Before he could get away, they seized him, their muscular arms effortlessly controlling him as they dragged him before the grand prince. Ivan glared at him with a contempt and hatred that burned into Shuisky's very soul. He contemplated him for a few moments, and suddenly, Shuisky felt overwhelming fear rise in his gut. The boy standing in front of

him was only thirteen years old, but he seemed to tower over Shuisky at that moment like a vengeful giant, ready to destroy.

Then Ivan looked up at the huntsmen. Still just a boy, he had to tip his head quite far back to meet their eyes. “Throw him to the dogs,” he said.

Shuisky screamed. He flung himself back, straining against the arms of the huntsmen, but they were only too keen to obey their grand prince and rid themselves of the oppressive regent. Ivan followed as they walked toward the enclosure where he kept his hunting dogs. There was a huge pack of them, slavering beasts with crazy eyes, fed only the bare minimum—the hungrier they were, the better they'd hunt. And they hadn't hunted for a long time. They started to bark and fling themselves against the walls as the screaming, fighting Shuisky was dragged toward their enclosure. Their white teeth flashed, drool and foam dripping from their baying jaws. The huntsmen dragged the door open, one of them beating the dogs back with a huge stick. The other seized Shuisky, and with a final scream, he was flung inside.

Immediately, the regent disappeared under a wave of hairy bodies. They fell upon him, their teeth ripping flesh, blood spraying and staining their muzzles as they fed. They didn't so much hunt him down as simply tear him apart. Fighting with each other, their teeth crunching on bones, the dogs ripped him to pieces. By the time the feeding frenzy was over, only bones remained.

And standing a little to one side, his dark eyes intent, Ivan watched it all. He had been right about his power after all, and it was intoxicating to watch as the man who had caused him so much pain was destroyed at his order. He had the power now to kill anyone who stood in his way. He would never have to suffer like he had as a small child again.

He could do whatever he wanted, have whatever he wanted. And what the young Grand Prince of Moscow wanted now, more than anything, was power.

ıpter 6 – The Coronation of the First Tsar

Illustration IV: Monomakh's Cap

The city streets echoed with the sound of thousands of church bells. The sound of them bounced from rooftop to rooftop, chasing the dawn's light across the celebrating city, as every church in Moscow tolled out its glad tidings with the pure tones of the bells filling every corner of every building. High and deep, slow or merry, the bells rang. They rang proclaiming that a new Grand Prince of Moscow was going to be crowned—and this time, he would not be simply a grand prince but also the first tsar that Russia would ever know.

Astride a shining and prancing steed, Ivan rode toward the Kremlin, his stallion tossing its head and dancing so that its iron shoes struck sparks on the street. Ivan’s dark eyes glittered with anticipation. He'd been born for this day, and all of Russia had awaited his arrival with the same expectation that he felt now. Despite the best efforts of the boyars, Ivan had not only made it to manhood, but he had seized his opportunity for power.

Ever since Ivan had thrown Andrei Mikhailovich Shuisky to his hungry dogs,

the Shuisky family had viewed him with fear. It was obvious that he would no longer be cowed by the warring boyars. Their days of harassing and disrespecting Ivan were over. He had finally realized how much power he had, and for a teenage boy, it was both dangerous and intoxicating.

It was three years after Shuisky's grisly death. Ivan had continued to further his education, influenced by the Metropolitan of Moscow—a man named Makari—who seems to have been one of the few positive presences in his young life. Instead of trying to grab power for himself, Makari appears to have been genuinely interested in building up a fair and able ruler over Russia. Ivan had also been studying the letters written by his grandfather, Ivan the Great, and a word in those correspondences had jumped out at him with irresistible attraction: *tsar*. Translated, the word means something like *emperor*. While the Grand Prince of Moscow was the most powerful man in Russia, considerable power was still possessed by the grand princes of other important cities all over the country. The Grand Prince of Moscow was not so much an emperor as he was the most powerful member of a group of kings. Ivan wanted to change that.

It could have been the writings of his grandfather, in which he sometimes referred to himself as “tsar” even though he did not officially bear the title, that had inspired Ivan to adopt not only the crown of the Grand Prince of Moscow but also that of Tsar of All the Russias. In doing so, Ivan proclaimed himself a descendant of Rurik, that Norse explorer who had first made Novgorod his own. He also made himself the ruler over all of the Grand Princes of Russia, unifying the government and setting himself at its very head as emperor. Word of the brutal execution of Andrei Shuisky had gotten out, and no one dared oppose him.

So, on that shining winter day of January 16th, 1547, the sixteen-year-old Ivan rode toward his coronation, ready to become the first Russian tsar. He was decked out in his princely robes which were gorgeously jeweled and ornately embroidered. The ceremony that was to follow was just as elaborate as the gleaming robes that the tsar wore. The Russian Orthodox Church presided over the entire ceremony; Makari, as the Metropolitan and thus the spiritual head of the Russian Orthodox Church, would likely have led it, reading Scripture, saying prayers, and laying his hands on young Ivan. Finally, Makari lifted the beautiful Russian crown from its place and held it out to Ivan. Known as the Monomakh's Cap, it was a striking thing wrought with gold. Today, the cap is bordered with fur and decked out in jewels, but when

Ivan received it from Makari's hands, it was a plainer thing. Still gleaming in gold but lacking the trimmings, it seemed warlike, almost utilitarian. The weight in his hands was a strong reminder of the responsibility that the fate of his birthright had bestowed upon him, but Ivan could hardly wait to lift it up and rest it on his head. He was now the Tsar of All the Russias, the emperor of his world.

He was the most powerful man in the country. And he liked it.

* * * *

Before Ivan's coronation, he had realized that he needed something else in order to become a true tsar: a wife. Without being married, Ivan would not be fully considered a man. What was more, he wouldn't be able to produce an heir, although it is possible he had a few offspring already considering there were some allegations of rape brought against him during his wild times riding through the city and causing chaos with the “friends” that the Shuiskys had prescribed for him. It was time for Ivan to find a woman, and once he had made this proclamation, nobles all over Russia immediately sprang into action.

Due to his status, Ivan would only be able to marry a woman of noble blood. In fact, it would be best for him to marry a princess—the higher her rank, the better for strengthening alliances with other powerful men in Russia. Lesser nobles, however, still tried their hand at getting their daughters to become the new tsaritsa (empress), and so hundreds of them flocked to the Kremlin to present their daughters for Ivan's inspection. By some accounts, as many as 1,500 girls were brought for Ivan to choose from.

Princess after princess was brought in and paraded like a show horse for Ivan's pleasure. He turned them all away one by one, despite their beauty and rank. The poor girls must have felt like they were cattle at some auction; it is difficult to imagine whether they were more dismayed by the insult of being turned down by the tsar-to-be or relieved not to have to spend their lives with this tempestuous young man. And the more girls Ivan turned down, the more tempestuous he became. Angry with the inferiority of the brides presented to him, Ivan grew frustrated and anxious, shouting at the girls and probably kicking a few servants around for good measure.

Then, a white-skinned, dark-eyed girl was brought forward. Mid-rant, Ivan stopped, staring at her. She was about his own age; her smooth, round cheeks were still those of a girl, but her elegant curves belonged to a woman. Her

eyes were lowered, her small hands folded neatly in front of her, yet there was something a little fearless about her. Unlike the other girls, she neither groveled nor trembled. She just waited, her gaze lowered in an attitude of demure respect.

There was a stillness about her that Ivan found irresistible. He took a step closer, drinking in her sweet, soft scent. She was motionless, poised, and controlled even in her meekness. There was so much calm in her; she was a mountain lake to Ivan's stormy sea, a pure blue sky to his thundercloud, a glacier to his avalanche. She soothed something deep inside of him, and he just couldn't take his eyes off her.

Her name was Anastasia Romanovna, and she was the daughter of a minor boyar. In comparison with the other women who had been brought up for Ivan during the bride-show, she was a nobody, only a few steps above being a mere commoner. But it was neither her rank, nor her wealth, nor her beauty that attracted Ivan. It was something in her soul, something calm and resolute that tempered his madness and soothed the pain that had driven him to such unspeakable acts even at his young age.

Once Ivan met Anastasia, there was never any question about it. While he spent several weeks with his shortlist of girls to get to know them better, Anastasia was the only one who could calm him, and it didn't take long for him to fall head over heels in love with her. Only a few weeks after Ivan's coronation, they were married, and Anastasia became the tsaritsa of Russia.

Anastasia was the first bright and joyous thing in Ivan's life since the death of his mother almost ten years before. She had an undeniably positive effect on his mental state, reversing—or at least numbing—the effects that years of trauma had had on his young psyche. Her influence on him would usher in a time of justice, ambition, and capability as the first tsar—and of joy and peace in his own heart for the first time in many years.

ıpter 7 – An Ambitious Young Ruler

With Anastasia's calming influence soothing Ivan's desperate need for power, he could finally become the educated and sophisticated ruler that he always had the potential to be.

One of Ivan's key allies and advisers remained Makari, the Metropolitan of Moscow. Makari wanted the young man to govern over a united, powerful, and just land, using Christian precepts taken from the Russian Orthodox Church to set the standards for law and government. As such, as soon as he took power, Ivan began to institute a number of reforms designed to unify his scattered empire.

Most of Ivan's power was tied to the Church itself. In fact, when proclaiming himself tsar, he tightened the bonds of church and state. It is thus unsurprising that one of Ivan's first steps was to summon a series of church councils, the first of which met in 1547, the very same year of his coronation. The purpose of the councils was to organize the Church's administration, making it more systematic and methodical so that it was better suited to help Ivan deal with matters of the government. Several saints were also canonized leading to a growing list of Russian saints that included Aleksandr Nevsky, the ancestor of Ivan's who had won the fateful Battle of the Ice.

Being a young and inexperienced ruler, and not having grown up with the example and influence of his father, Ivan realized that he couldn't govern alone. Now that Anastasia was helping him to not feel so helpless and traumatized, Ivan was able to recognize his need for help and advice. To improve his government and provide himself with a platform of support and guidance, Ivan established the first *zemski sobor*.

The name translates to “assembly of the land,” and essentially, it was the first parliamentary gathering in Russian history. It consisted of representatives from many different social ranks, including boyars, clergymen, monks, and even commoners as long as they were freemen and owned land. Ivan presided over these gatherings and held them often throughout his reign, usually to discuss major issues such as wars. The *zemski sobor* meetings were to become a part of the Russian government well into the seventeenth century.

With the help of these more experienced members of government, Ivan was able to put together an entirely new legal code in 1550, only three years into his reign. The previous code that Russia had been using was half a century

old and had questionable roots; this one would be based, as Makari had encouraged Ivan to do, on justice and well rooted in Scripture according to the Eastern Orthodox Church. This new code was known as the Sudebnik of 1550.

Before the Sudebnik was finished, however, Ivan would face his first disaster as tsar. In the very first year of his reign, he would have to deal with the threat of almost total destruction of his seat of government. Moscow was about to endure a tragedy.

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The flames roared. They churned and charged, beaten by the wind into something that was less like a mindless natural occurrence and more like a vengeful beast that sought to destroy anything that stood in its path. Houses and streets, businesses and barns, people and animals—it didn't matter; everything was fair game to the bellowing blaze that ripped through the streets of Moscow, quicker and more destructive than any invading army.

Ivan, sixteen years old, had to watch wide-eyed from the windows of the Kremlin as the fire inched closer and closer. Most of Moscow at the time was built from wood, and every house the fire reached was nothing but fuel. Whole streets were engulfed in flames in a matter of seconds, the day turned black by the smoke that reached out its sinuous tendrils to strangle the sun. As Ivan watched, there was a terrible crack, like the sound of an enemy cannon. Everywhere, fleeing residents of the city fell flat, and Ivan himself cringed, clinging to the windowsill, but there was no enemy except for the fire itself. It had reached an armory somewhere and found a barrel of gunpowder, and the white smoke of the explosion bloomed into the air.

The streets were filled with a stampede of panicking people. Peasants and nobles, slaves and masters—there was no rank here, nothing but fear as they ran from the burning flames. Thousands of people flooded through the city as they fled, rushing over one another, trampling one another, and clinging to children and what possessions they had managed to snatch from the teeth of the blaze. The snapping and hissing of the fire were punctuated by the screams of those who had not been lucky enough. Agonized animal sounds of terror and pain rose into the sky as people were trapped and burned to death in the pitiless flames.

The heat of the fire was such that stone cracked and metal melted. Hot copper, glowing red, streamed down the walls of the houses; there were

screams of pain where it dripped on people, searing through clothes and eating into human flesh. The smell was appalling, and the smoke was so thick that it was almost impossible to breathe, but the smell was worse with the odor of scalded flesh, some of it belonging to animals but much of it belonging to people as they burned and died, permeating the air. And still, the fire marched on, leaping from house to house, stalking through the city like a lion on the hunt.

The fire had no respect for the ranks of those whose homes it decimated. In that maze of wooden dwellings, with narrow and twisting alleyways, even a modern-day fire service would have found it almost impossible to contain; without hoses, fire trucks, fire hydrants, or an organized water system, the citizens of Moscow didn't stand a chance. Ivan could do little more than watch as the ravaging beast stalked closer and closer to the Kremlin.

Smoke filled the air of the Cathedral of the Dormition deep within the Kremlin, sinking into the lungs of Makari where he knelt in desperate prayer for his city. He refused to budge even after most of the other people in the cathedral had fled. Eventually, some of the clergymen had to drag him out of the building, hoisting him down to a breach in the walls of the Kremlin to lower him to the riverbank by means of a rope. Ivan and Anastasia were likely busy evacuating themselves, rushing from the fortress that would withstand any army but not the force of nature that was reducing the capital of Russia to ashes. Makari, however, still resisted; he wanted to go back to the cathedral to hold onto his silent and despairing vigil. He would have resisted more if he'd known that his companions' plan to safely lower him to the riverbank was botched. Someone's hand slipped, or perhaps the rope snapped, or maybe they just fumbled in their haste and panic. Either way, Makari tumbled to the ground, hitting the riverbank with a flat and frightening thump. They had to carry him to safety, his heart barely beating inside a broken body.

As for Ivan, he could only look back on a blazing city as thousands of people perished in the blaze, hoping that his own home might survive the onslaught of flame. He was one of the few lucky ones. The Kremlin, though blackened by smoke, was not destroyed. But by the time the fire finally died down in the small hours of June 22nd, 1547, 80,000 of Ivan's subjects would find out that they had not been so lucky. Only two-thirds of Moscow's buildings still stood, many of them damaged and sullied by the smoke; the rest were nothing but ash and rubble. By some estimates, as many as 3,700 people were

dead. Children were not included in this count, so one can only speculate on how many people perished that day in the most brutal manner, burned to death in their own homes and businesses.

Ivan and Anastasia had fled to Sparrow Hills, an area on the edge of Moscow. They sought refuge there from the fire and remained safe from its awful power, but Ivan's trouble wasn't over. With 80,000 people rendered homeless, the lower classes were desperate, scared, and looking for someone to blame. That someone became Ana Glinskaya, Ivan's grandmother who was accused of using sorcery to burn down Moscow. She had seemed suspect to the peasantry ever since she had failed to hold together her daughter's regency after Elena died. Crowds formed in the streets, people with sooty faces and singed hair, their eyebrows burned from their very faces, blisters on their hands, and their voices hoarse and harsh from smoke inhalation. With blackened lips and wide, white eyes, they stormed Sparrow Hills, shouting for what they perceived to be justice. Ivan found himself helplessly pinned in his house, stripped of the fortifications that had made the Kremlin a safe residence. He had to face the screaming crowds with little to offer them. He was just sixteen years old and only six months into his reign, and already his people were rebelling against him because of something completely out of his control.

The crowds were baying for his grandmother's blood, demanding that Ivan should hand her over to him. It would have been so easy for the young ruler to panic and revert to his wild and crazy ways, perhaps to send an army to crush the desperate people or to ride out and butcher them himself the way he had galloped through the streets and knocked over pedestrians only a few years ago. But he was not the boy that he had been then. He was a rational and steady man thanks to the presence of the sweet and gentle Anastasia by his side. She calmed him, soothed him, and allowed him to think straight. And so, instead of panicking, Ivan negotiated. He refused to hand over his grandmother but succeeded in defusing the crowd with promises of laws that would prevent this from ever happening again. Shortly afterward, Ivan made good on his promise. He made it a law for every residence to have a water barrel on its rooftop, another in its garden, and for cooking stoves to be kept far from residential buildings. These precautions were a huge step forward toward protecting Moscow from fire, although in the later years of Ivan's reign, they would prove to not be enough. He also made some changes in the administration that allowed members of the lower classes to hold somewhat

more power in lower positions of the government.

Ivan had weathered the first great storm of his reign, and he had done so admirably, negotiating a peaceful resolution to what could have been a bloody rebellion and taking significant steps toward preventing such a tragedy from ever occurring again. While he was left with a ravaged city and faced the monumental task of rebuilding Moscow, Ivan's future was looking bright. And for the next few years, his reign would only get brighter.

ıpter 8 – Books and Cathedrals

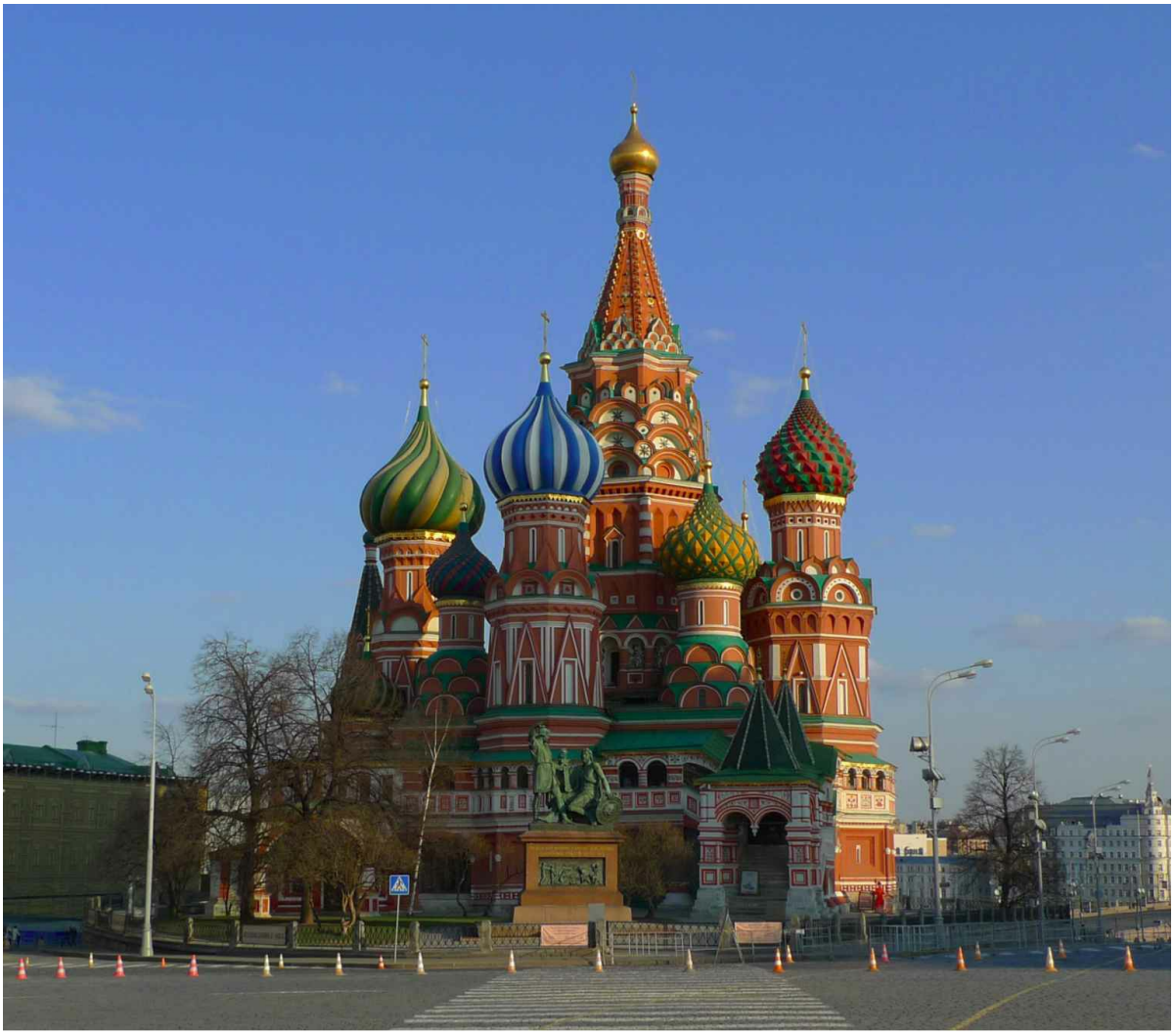

Illustration V: St. Basil's Cathedral, modern day

Even while he was trying to rebuild Moscow, Ivan's attention was soon demanded on the more distant front of the Volga River.

Five hundred miles away from the ashes of Ivan's capital city, there stood the city of Kazan. It was a glittering shard from the shattered pieces of the Golden Horde, the great Mongolian kingdom that had once commanded the length and breadth of Russia. Ivan the Great had freed his country from their tyranny, but he had failed to conquer Kazan. It remained as the last stronghold of that once great power and a brooding menace on the border of Russia. Kazan controlled the Volga River, an important trade route, preventing Russia from engaging in trade with Siberia and other areas. Worse, the people of Kazan conducted frequent raids into Russia itself,

looting towns for their treasures and even kidnapping Russians to sell to the Persian and Turkish slave markets.

Something would have to be done about Kazan. And the moment that Ivan took power, he decided that the time had come to do it. Ignoring the problem would not only result in Russia's continued inability to trade along the Volga, but Ivan feared that the Tatars of Kazan might even invade; given time and space to grow their army, they could even return to the former glory of the Golden Horde and wreak just as much havoc as their ancestors had. Ivan was determined to follow in his grandfather's footsteps and rid Russia of the Tatars once and for all.

The same year that he was made tsar, Ivan sent a campaigning army out to Kazan in a bid to bring the last of the Tatars to their knees. He also ordered the fortress of Svyazhsk to be built on the banks of the Volga opposite Kazan; it was designed upriver by the best of Russia's architects, and the pieces of the fortress were even built there, being floated down to the front in numbered bits like a prefab house.

Still, for three years, the Russians struggled with the Tatars, never gaining any ground and never winning any major battles. Svyazhsk was built, the army went to battle, yet it was to no avail. By 1552, Ivan—then in his early twenties—had sent out two different campaigns against Kazan, but the fortress of his enemies remained stubbornly in place, defying his authority as Tsar of All the Russias. So, Ivan finally decided that he would have to lead his army himself. He kissed Anastasia goodbye, leaving her behind in the safety of the Kremlin, and rode out to war.

The past five years had been the golden era of Ivan's reign with many reforms in the government, including many that limited the power of the hated boyars that had made Ivan's childhood so unutterably miserable. Personally, however, for Ivan himself, there had been deeply difficult times. Anastasia had borne him their first child in 1548, a little girl who so closely resembled her mother that they named her Anna. She enjoyed all the happiness that Ivan had been denied as a child. Even though Ivan was only eighteen at the time, with Anastasia even younger, this was not an unusual age to become parents during that era. Little Anna would have had excellent care from her experienced nurses as well as her parents. But sadly, regardless of the care they received, medieval children were still playing a dangerous game of survival simply by being alive. With child mortality rates in the Middle Ages soaring as high as fifty percent, all children had a slim chance of making it to

adulthood, mostly due to the poor medical practices that allowed many childhood diseases to run rampant. Poor little Anna likely succumbed to one of these, passing away in 1550, less than a month before her second birthday.

Less than a year after the death of Anna, Anastasia gave birth to another little girl. This one, named Maria, was born on March 17th, 1551. While her date of death is unknown, Maria would not live long either. She was possibly still alive when her father left for Kazan in 1552.

Still, Ivan and Anastasia were both young, and he knew that more children would come. He had Anastasia, so he felt that nothing could really stand against him as her loving presence gave him the security that he hadn't been able to cling to since the death of his mother, Elena. Now, he rode confidently for Kazan, determined to subdue it at last.

It was the summer of 1552, and Ivan was almost twenty-two years old, but he was at the head of a tremendous army. 150,000 strong, it consisted of infantry, cavalry, and even the heavy artillery that would be necessary to bring down the strong stone walls of Kazan. Ivan had tried to negotiate with the Khan of Kazan, but all attempts to find a peaceful resolution had failed. Finally, Ivan had threatened the khan with war, turning it into a conflict of religions as Eastern Orthodox Russia met Muslim Kazan. The khan was arrogant in his response. “All is ready for you here,” he told the young tsar contemptuously. “We invite you to the feast.”

And so, on August 30th, 1552, Ivan and his army pitched their tents on the banks of the Volga, determined to take Kazan. While Ivan was with the army, it was primarily led by more experienced military commanders, among them Ivan's close friend Andrei Mikhailovich Kurbsky.

At once, they dragged forth the most intimidating weapons they had in their arsenal: cannons. These majestic weapons could cause an awe-inspiring amount of carnage, spewing heavy projectiles across vast distances to crush opposing soldiers and destroy whole sections of castle walls. It was in bucketing rain and with several cannons that Ivan opened his attack on Kazan, hammering the walls with cannonballs that punched through the wood. Yet somehow those walls seemed impenetrable despite the destruction sown by Ivan's cannons. The Tatars were quick to repair their broken fortifications, swarming over the walls of their fortress and holding it up against the deadly onslaught.

Through the driving rain, Ivan ordered his infantry forward. Blinking and

struggling against the wind, they charged, but they were effortlessly repulsed. Worse, when they staggered back to camp, they found that their tents were flapping uselessly in the wind; everything was soaked, and the gunpowder that drove Ivan's cannons was under threat by the storm.

Ivan could think of only one explanation for the terrible weather. The people of Kazan, viewed by the Russians as being devilish pagans, were casting some kind of a curse on his army. They must have commanded the storm to stop their enemies. He ordered a religious relic to be brought to the battlefield, and legend has it that the storm stopped at once.

Now, Ivan's men could renew their attack, and they did so with vigor and zeal, spurred on by the hope that divine powers were on their tsar's side. Undermining the Tatars' defenses, the Russians started to at last bring down some of the walls of Kazan. A breakthrough came several weeks into the siege when Ivan's men succeeded in blowing up Kazan's water system, rendering the citizens helpless and their situation suddenly desperate. Without water, the city could not hold out against Ivan's might.

Still, the defenders clung on grimly, knowing that laying down their arms now would likely mean that most of them would be butchered anyway—such was siege warfare of the Middle Ages. Ivan, on his knees and praying desperately for victory, thought of a new tactic. He had some of his Tatar prisoners brought out and led to where they were within sight of the defenders, ordering them—probably by force—to beg their people to surrender and be done with it. As the prisoners' terrified voices rose into the air, a rain of arrows rose to meet them. The defenders shot down their own people where they stood in bonds among Ivan's soldiers.

Their brutal defiance proved to be fruitless. On October 2nd, 1552, Ivan gazed out over the beleaguered city and knew that he had as good as won already. He gave the order, and his army rushed forward, a wave of infantry slamming against the gates of Kazan. Ivan remained back in the camp, praying for a victory in his first campaign as tsar. And as he waited, the walls of Kazan fell at last. The people within were put to the sword, and Ivan made no move to stop his bloodthirsty hordes from butchering everything in their path. Hundreds had already died in the siege, and hundreds more died that day as the Russians at last could vent their fury on their stubborn and tenacious foe.

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Kazan was practically razed to the ground. The Russian forces overran the

city, and their victory was as decisive as it was complete, leaving Ivan in total control of Kazan and the Middle Volga. His victory opened up the trade route that he'd been desperately hoping to control, and Ivan rode back to Moscow to be given a hero's welcome, as well as glad news. Anastasia had borne Ivan his third child, and this time, it was a little boy. Ivan would not be faced with the same struggle that his father had. The little boy was named Dmitri.

To celebrate his annexation of Kazan, Ivan ordered the building of one of Russia's most famous churches: St. Basil's Cathedral. This towering work of art, a majestic thing of graceful curves and glittering color, was completed in 1554. It has since become a landmark of Moscow; set at the very center of the famous Red Square, the cathedral is now painted in dazzling colors with bright designs on its patterned roofs. When Ivan ordered for it to be built, however, it was a study of elegance in white stone, its roof clad in blinding gold. It was designed to match the Kremlin, and its beauty was unrivaled—so much so that a legend exists claiming that Ivan had its architect brutally blinded so that he could never build something that would be the equal of it. This, however, has proven to be nothing more than a myth.

The truth is that as St. Basil's Cathedral took shape on Ivan's doorstep, he had not yet earned his moniker of Ivan the Terrible. The cruelty that had shaped his boyhood was still hidden, sung to sleep by the lullaby of Anastasia's presence. With baby Dmitri in her arms, she remained a safe harbor for Ivan's stormy soul.

For the next seven years, his rule continued in relative peace and success. In 1553, the year after Kazan fell, Ivan ordered the introduction of Russia's first printing press. The Moscow Print Yard was its home, a stately, palace-like building in the heart of Moscow. The elegant white pillars and extravagant halls of the Print Yard now house a university, but during Ivan's reign, multiple books were printed there in Russian and distributed throughout the country. It was a breakthrough in literature and education, and it was Ivan's attempt to pay back the only companions he had had in his dark and troubled childhood—books and reading.

By 1556, Ivan had relatively peacefully annexed Astrakhan, another enemy city farther along the Volga. He now had complete control over the trade routes to Siberia. Slave markets were destroyed, and while thousands of Muslims were displaced to make room for Ivan's Eastern Orthodox citizens, the annexation of this khanate opened up cultural borders for Russia.

It was all going well for the young tsar. For the first time in his life, he had control and comfort, along with a secure young family, a burgeoning country, and people who were loyal to their first steady ruler since the death of Vasili. The future was looking bright for Ivan, and his cruel and strange ways seemed to have been left behind somewhere in the shadows of his unhappy past.

Little did he know that his life—and the fate of all Russia—was about to take an appalling turn for the worse.

ıpter 9 – Death in the Family

Illustration VI: A mixed media figurine of Tsaritsa Anastasia Romanovna by George S. Stuart, photographed by Peter d'Aprix.

Ivan feared he was on his deathbed.

Quaking with weakness, his burning skin dry and chafing against his bedclothes, Ivan could barely make out the shape of the ceiling above him.

Fever dreams chased one another through his mind and into his reality, bringing back flashes of his terrible past. Vague flickers of his father's face fading into images of his mother. The sound of her laughter. Her smell. The screams when they found her, cold and lifeless, poisoned by the boyars. Ivan tossed in his bed, his black hair soaked with sweat as he moaned against the dreams which just kept coming. Clinging to Yuri in abject terror as the boyars fought outside their bedroom chambers, hungry and scared and alone. Riding through the streets of Moscow, trampling all in his path. The strange satisfaction he found in hurting others. The shrieks of Andrei Shuisky as the hunting hounds tore him limb from limb. Ivan's coronation as tsar. Anastasia…

Anastasia. Ivan opened his eyes. Anastasia was leaning over him, her beautiful face lined with worry. She laid a cool hand against his blazing forehead, and he could see the concern in her eyes. Ivan's physicians had told him that the illness he had could not be cured. Even though he was just twenty-three years old, he was going to die young.

The fact that Ivan had a son and heir—Dmitri, then only a few months old—was little comfort to him. Vasili also had an heir when he died, but because Ivan was so young, all of Russia was still plunged into chaos and darkness as the boyars grappled for power. Ivan knew that he couldn't allow the same thing to happen. Even though his reforms had stripped the boyars of much of their power, there was nothing to prevent them from seizing the country that Ivan had so carefully cultivated and ripping it apart in their slavering jaws—just like Ivan's dogs had torn Andrei Shuisky limb from limb.

Ivan was desperate. He couldn't let that happen to his Russia, and he couldn't condemn his beloved wife to the struggle that Elena had to face in her final years, much less allow Dmitri to suffer the childhood that he had endured. Fully believing that he was dying, he sent out messages to all of the boyars, demanding that they swear their unconditional allegiance to baby Dmitri.

The boyars, too, knew that he was dying. And as one man, they refused.

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Despite what his physicians had said, however, Ivan didn't die. He recovered, although something in his mind was never the same again. It was as if the fever had stripped away some of the joy and peace that Anastasia had brought to his psyche, once again revealing the raw pain and agonized cruelty that had characterized him as a boy. Some historians speculate that the

physiological effects of the illness—the nature of which is still uncertain—led to his declining mental health. However, the refusal of the boyars to accept little Dmitri as their ruler could have been equally to blame. The hated boyars that had made Ivan's childhood so unutterably miserable had now committed what he saw as a terrible act of treason, and Ivan couldn't forgive them.

Even if the boyars had agreed to swear allegiance to Dmitri, it would ultimately have mattered little. Just a few months after his father's miraculous recovery, little Dmitri squirmed out of the arms of his nurse and fell to the ground as she was walking around the grounds of the Kremlin with him. Before she could catch him, the toddler splashed into the river. Not yet one year old, the little tsarevich drowned.

Despite the boyars' betrayal and Dmitri's death, it would seem that Ivan managed to more or less pick up the pieces and cope—or perhaps it was Anastasia who was able to put his injured soul back together after every blow. She stayed steadfastly by his side throughout it all, and after his recovery, Ivan seemed to return to his normal self for a while and turned back to campaigning and conquests.

Once both Kazan and Astrakhan had been captured, Ivan set his sights still farther afield: Livonia. Comprised of lands that today are part of Latvia and Estonia, Livonia was a country bordering Russia, blocking the passage of Russian merchants to the Baltic Sea. Keen to open up another trade route, Ivan decided to launch a campaign to invade Livonia and capture it to expand Russia's territory. In 1558, he started the Livonian War, a conflict that was to continue for many years.

The precarious balance of the tsar's fragile mental state had wobbled but returned to normal. Yet it would not remain that way for long. A tragedy was about to strike—one that, even after the deaths of both his parents and losing several children, would prove to be too much for Ivan the Terrible to handle.

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As the summer of 1560 brought a blush of green to the cheeks of the countryside surrounding Moscow, Ivan gazed out of the windows of the Kremlin, contentedly studying the city over which he ruled. It was beautiful and bustling; the glittering golden roofs of his new cathedral caught the sun, reminding him of his resounding victory over Kazan. Having heard glad news from the Livonian front where his men had successfully overrun many

of the Livonian knights according to Andrei Mikhailovich Kurbsky, the same commander that had helped lead Ivan's army to victory at Kazan, Ivan hoped that another great victory was at his fingertips.

As for his home life, things were looking up. Anastasia remained in the bloom of health and had given birth to three more children since the death of little Dmitri: another boy, Ivan, in 1554; a daughter named Eudoxia in 1556; and a third son, Feodor, in 1557. Little Eudoxia only survived eighteen months, joining Ivan's first three children in the royal tombs. But Ivan Ivanovich and Feodor were both healthy and strong. Ivan was particularly proud of his eldest son, who had now just turned six. He was a sprightly boy, intelligent, and being given everything that Ivan himself had been denied as a child. Ivan was determined to give his son the best start possible—after all, he would be tsar one day.

Ivan smiled to himself as he looked out over the city. He could never have asked for a better tsaritsa than his beloved Anastasia. She was as beautiful as she was gentle and had borne him healthy, vigorous children. Evidence would suggest, too, that Anastasia's love for Ivan was genuine and fervent. She loved him not only because of how well he ruled during their marriage but also because of how much he cared for her. And he couldn’t have cared for her more than on that summer's day in 1560 when Tsaritsa Anastasia Romanova became suddenly and inexplicably sick. Ivan rushed to her bedside to find his young wife, who had been so healthy only a few days before, a mere ghost of herself. Her thoughts and words were scrambled; normally so patient, now her moods swung wildly, and her hands shook uncontrollably.

At once, all of the best physicians in the city were summoned and ordered to save the tsaritsa. Driven on by the wild cries of Ivan, they did everything they could for Anastasia. But as the days then weeks passed, she didn't get any better—she got worse. Sweat soaked her brown hair, pinning it down to her pillow as she gasped and thrashed on her luxurious bed. Her flawless face was pale, her clothes stained with sweat and vomit, and her breath came in ragged and rattling gasps as her muscles struggled and failed to perform their everyday functions. Her limbs twitched uncontrollably, and as Ivan stared into her dark eyes and implored her to come back to him, it seemed that she could no longer recognize him or perhaps no longer see—he couldn't tell which.

Ivan screamed; he beat the walls with his fists, he shouted, he raged, he

prayed, and he begged for his beautiful wife to live. But Anastasia was too far gone. On August 7th, 1560, at the age of only thirty years old, she breathed her last. The sweet young soul that had tempered the madness of Russia's supreme ruler had left the world.

To say that Ivan was devastated would be a disgusting understatement. He was not merely heartbroken—it was more as if the death of Anastasia had reached into his chest and ripped his heart clean out, leaving only an aching and empty hole. Her death didn't wound him; it destroyed him. The man that he had become as her husband—the man that he might have been all along if his childhood had not been such an ordeal—was gone, shattered, torn apart by his inconsolable loss. In the face of such insurmountable grief, Ivan seemed to have simply lost his mind. He threw himself onto the floor of his fortress and banged his head over and over again on the marble until his blood ran and smeared, and still he went on, trying to hammer the agony out of himself. Anastasia was the only one who had ever been able to handle him in his rages; now, there was nobody, and Ivan's two little sons could only have listened as their father mutilated himself in his terrible pain.

Anastasia was laid to rest in the Ascension Convent in the Kolomenskoye, not far from the church of that same name built to honor the birth of Ivan himself. The two little boys were now motherless, and their father was driven wild by grief. In the following months, Ivan would go on a rampage of torture and execution, convinced that Anastasia had been poisoned by one of the hated boyars. They had betrayed him when he was ill, they had hated him as a child, and now he was sure that they had killed the one thing that could soothe his injured heart. Whether or not the boyars did kill Anastasia is still uncertain, but historians have since uncovered evidence that strongly suggests that Anastasia was poisoned by mercury. There is no way of knowing who exactly poisoned her, but Ivan was too deep in the throes of his bereavement to care. He tortured and killed anyone whom he was even vaguely suspicious of, seeking solace once more in hurting those weaker than him now that Anastasia was no longer there for him.

Sadly, this was only the beginning. Ivan's reign and personal life would go into a terrible tailspin following Anastasia's death. And the boyars, whether they were involved in any crimes or not, were about to pay for everything their families had ever done to him.

ıpter 10 – Betrayal

With Anastasia gone, Ivan only had one friend left to him in all the world. While the Russian populace adored him—with the obvious exception of the boyars—Ivan had never seemed capable of forming close ties with anyone apart from his wife and his single close friend: Andrei Mikhailovich Kurbsky.

Kurbsky had been a part of Ivan's reign from the very beginning, helping him in his first military campaign against Kazan and now fighting in Livonia. When Anastasia died, it was natural that Kurbsky would reach out to his friend and try to bring him some form of comfort and solace. But as Ivan continued to wreak havoc through the ranks of the boyars, harming and killing them left and right, Kurbsky started to back away from his old friend. Although Kurbsky himself appears to have been a fairly just and rational man, he was a boyar himself, and he'd personally known, and even been related to, many of the people that Ivan was treating so mercilessly. Kurbsky wanted Anastasia's killer to be punished, as did all of Russia, but he knew that Ivan was not acting for justice. He was acting for some way of expressing and relieving the incredible pain that he was feeling.

Perhaps Kurbsky tried to talk sense into Ivan. Maybe he even tried to stop him. But Ivan was having none of it. His pain was incoherent and overwhelming, and he had the power to deal with it any way he wanted—even if that meant taking innocent lives.

Kurbsky had been fighting Ivan's wars for decades, and he was starting to grow weary of his moody ruler. So, he began to pull away from him, slowly distancing himself from the tempestuous tsar.

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It could easily have been expected that Ivan would not remarry, not after the death of the one person in the world whom he had truly loved. But whether it was political pressure, the hope of giving his boys a stepmother, or just a desperate longing for companionship that prompted him to do so, Ivan started seeking for another wife almost before Anastasia's body was cold.

The hunt for a suitable bride for the Tsar of All the Russias began, but this time it was not in the same festive mood that had brought about the bride-show thirteen years ago when Ivan had fallen in genuine love with the young daughter of a minor noble. Ivan's heart was gone now, torn away by

Anastasia's death. Now he was seeking a wife for her looks, wealth, or power. And Maria Temryukovna was all of the above.

The daughter of the Muslim prince of Kabarda, a part of the Caucasian region, Maria was a striking and priceless beauty. She turned heads everywhere she went with her smooth complexion and bright eyes, and what was more, their marriage was of strategic and symbolic importance. The Caucasus bordered on Russia, and even though the Livonian War was still in progress, Ivan was always keeping an eye out for a way to further expand his territory. The Caucasus was a logical next step, and marrying into its nobility was a logical first step. Ivan was captured by Maria's looks, but he was persuaded by her lineage, and they were married in 1561.

All of Russia had adored Anastasia. She had given them a stable and sensible ruler who had been able to improve the lives of many people. But Maria—she was another story. Beauty or not, she was, firstly, a pagan in their eyes. Although she converted to the Orthodox Church to marry Ivan, she was still viewed as being a foreigner of a foreign religion, and it didn't help that Anastasia's last request to Ivan had been to ask him not to marry a pagan woman. His marriage of Maria went directly against Anastasia's wishes.

To make matters worse, Maria's temperament was as far removed from Anastasia's as could be imagined. Where Anastasia had been wise, devout, gentle, and adept at controlling her husband's wild mood swings, Maria was vain and shallow. She failed to attend to her responsibilities as stepmother to Ivan Ivanovich and Feodor, and, worse, she was practically illiterate. The couple didn't get along on any level, and she became progressively less and less popular with the people.

Two years of marriage dragged past, and finally, in 1563, Maria gave birth to her first child. It was a little boy, and Ivan named him Vasili after his father, pleased that he now had three young sons to care for Russia when he was gone. Vasili, however, died when he was less than two months old, and Maria would never again bear children.

Ivan was once again keenly experiencing that isolation that had plagued him as a little orphan in the Kremlin when his only companion had been his deaf and mute little brother. Now, even Yuri was no longer at Ivan's side; even though Ivan had provided him with everything he could have possibly needed, he died of natural causes in 1563. He was closely followed by the Metropolitan Makari, who had never fully recovered from the injuries he

received when he fell during the Great Fire of 1547. He had been one of Ivan's staunchest supporters, and he passed away peacefully in 1563.

And so, ransacked by grief, tortured by his past, drained by constant paranoia, and feeling utterly alone, the emperor wandered the halls of the Kremlin, a ship tossed on stormy waters, his anchor stripped away by the cruel elements. The atrocities that Ivan had committed and would yet commit have led historians to label him as a psychopath, yet looking into the tragic circumstances of his lonely existence, it's an unlikely guess.

The trouble wasn't that Ivan didn't have any feelings. It was that he had too many.

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By 1564, Ivan had taken little action when it came to the administration of his country since Anastasia's death. Gripped by his fear and loneliness, he had more or less just kept Russia running; the war in Livonia plodded on with little real progress for either side.

This frustrated Kurbsky endlessly. While Ivan hung about listlessly in the Kremlin, Kurbsky was on the front lines, watching his men die. Russia's lack of progress was costing thousands of lives in the fighting, and Kurbsky had to do something about it. He was afraid, too, for his life and for the lives of his family; so many of the boyars had already been killed following Anastasia's death, and Kurbsky wasn't sure if Ivan's paranoia had any boundaries.

By contrast, Ivan's opponent, King Sigismund II of Poland, was an able and experienced ruler who had succeeded in uniting Poland, Lithuania, and Livonia into one powerful kingdom. He was capable, strong, and active in expanding and strengthening his kingdom. Kurbsky felt that he would be safer and more successful serving Sigismund rather than the unstable tsar who had once been his close friend, and so, he defected to the Livonian side, going to Sigismund to offer him his services as a military commander. Knowing that Kurbsky was one of Moscow's best, Sigismund gladly accepted him into his service and put him to work fighting against the very men that he had once commanded.

For Ivan, Kurbsky's defection was a complete and utter blindside. Kurbsky had been the one boyar that Ivan felt he could trust; that was why he had made his old friend the commander of his forces in Livonia in a time when he was incapable of thinking straight. Now, the last pillar that Ivan had left to lean on was yanked cruelly out from under him. He responded the only way

that he knew how—in rage and terror. Seizing Kurbsky's lands, he proceeded to persecute his family, writing furious letters to Kurbsky to condemn him for what he had done. Kurbsky, however, was firm in his decision. He was going to serve Sigismund now. Ivan could throw all the temper tantrums he wanted; they weren't going to change his mind.

In Ivan's eyes, Kurbsky's actions were the highest form of treason from one of the only people left in the world that he felt he could trust. Now, he realized that he couldn't trust anyone. His wife and mother had both been poisoned right in front of his eyes, killed by the boyars, and now his best friend had joined his enemy in trying to destroy him. Ivan was alone, and he was scared to death. He knew that he wasn't untouchable, and even though the people liked him and were loyal to him, the boyars both disliked and distrusted him.

Ivan felt like a little child again. He wore the title of tsar, yet at any moment, his own boyars could turn against him. Would they kill him like they killed Anastasia and Elena? He didn't want to give them the chance. And so, in secret, Ivan slipped out of Moscow.

He could think of only one place where he would feel safe: Aleksandrovskaya Sloboda. The hunting lodge was secreted away in the deep woods a few days' ride north of Moscow. It was isolated, yet strong and defensible, and had likely been a favorite haunt of his father Vasili before his death. Vasili had stayed there during his happy hunting trips, but Ivan fled there in fear now, looking over his shoulder as he rode, accompanied only by a small retinue in whom he tentatively placed a little trust. It was winter, and the falling snow masked the hoofprints of the horses, covering the icy landscape around them in a blanket of white.

When the tsar's absence was noted in the Kremlin, little was thought of it at first. It was not uncommon for the tsar to go on hunting expeditions; besides, he remained a pious and churchgoing man, and it would not have been unusual for him to have also ridden out on a pilgrimage. But as the days passed, the people began to worry. Where had Ivan gone? And why had he kept his movements so secret?

On January 3rd, 1565, the answers to their questions came in the form of two letters from Ivan. The first was addressed to the boyars, and it did not mince words. In it, Ivan confessed that he was afraid for his life and that he could no longer tolerate the treachery that he had been embroiled in ever since he was

a little child. It also announced his intention to abdicate the throne. The power that being Tsar of All the Russias had given him was no longer more important to him than staying alive. He wanted to leave it all behind, all the intrigue and the danger and everything that had broken him, everything that had destroyed him to the point where he now was, and stay in his hunting lodge in the woods with only a handful of trusted servants.

In the second letter, Ivan addressed his people directly. He reassured them that he had been honored to be their tsar and that the boyars were the only reason why he felt he had no option but to abdicate. Whether this was a genuine apology or a clever ploy of Ivan's is uncertain, but either way, it was certainly advantageous to Ivan's position. Enraged at the boyars for taking away their source of trust and stability in the government, the common people turned on them, threatening violence and revolt. The boyars themselves realized that the time when Ivan had been a child and the regency had been split among them had not been a good time for them either. Many boyars had been killed as they struggled between themselves, and none of them had ever truly risen to the power of the regency. The boyars realized that if Ivan did abdicate, then not only would the commoners be likely to engage in a violent uprising, but there would be no unified government to deal with them. Moscow and all of Russia was likely to find itself embroiled in utter chaos.

Waiting for a response to the letters, Ivan roamed through his lodge, enjoying all of the luxuries that he was used to back in the Kremlin. He spent much of his time in his enormous library where he had amassed a vast collection of books, some of them incredibly old and rare even then. Ivan was on the very brink of losing everything, but perhaps here in this time when his title as tsar hung in the balance, we may find one rare moment where Ivan's heart was at peace. He was alone, but at least he was safe. One is left to wonder if the tsar's story would have had a happier ending if he had stayed in Aleksandrovskaya Sloboda with his books for the rest of his life as he'd intended.

Yet it was not to be. The boyars were shocked by Ivan's abdication, and they realized that Russia needed him, temperamental as he was. They begged him to return, and Ivan was reluctant at first. As much as he had enjoyed being tsar, he couldn't bear the thought of ever being betrayed again. The boyars kept pleading him to come back, and eventually, Ivan relented, but on one terrible condition: He wanted free rein to persecute traitors any way that he

liked, avoiding all legal channels. Such was their desperation that the boyars agreed.

Ivan returned, and order was restored to Moscow. The first Tsar of All the Russias would continue to hold onto his crown. But the boyars would learn to regret their decision. They were about to enter an age of terror and darkness the likes of which they had never seen before.

ıpter 11 – Revenge

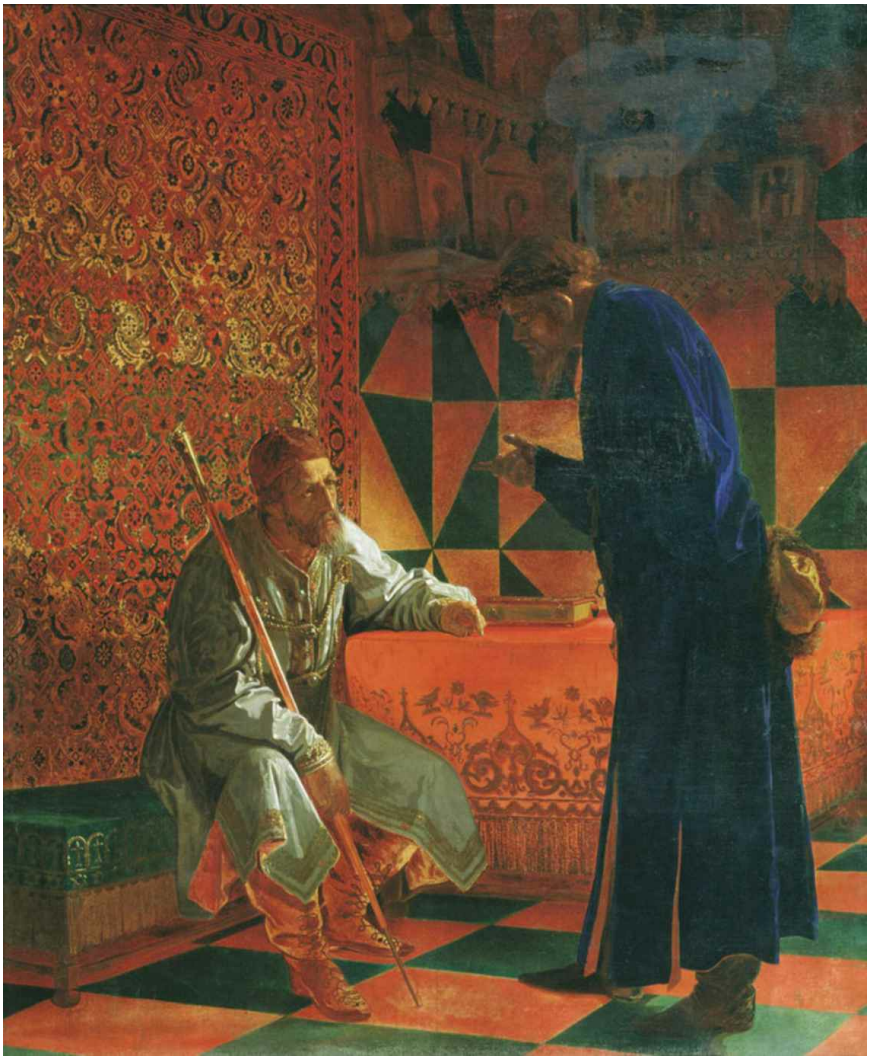


Illustration VII: Ivan IV and Maluta Skuratov *by G. Sedov. Skuratov is recorded as being a senior officer of the* Oprichniki.

Upon his return to Moscow, Ivan found himself confronted with the most challenges he had ever faced as tsar. Kurbsky's defection had led to a massive turn for the worse in the Livonian War with the Russian forces struggling without their strongest leader; the war had been raging for years now and was starting to take its toll on Russia's money and manpower. Knowing this, the Tatars started small invasions on Russia's borders, trying to take advantage of this new weakness to bring down the juggernaut that had so easily captured Kazan and Astrakhan in the 1550s. Also linked to the Livonian War was sea trading blockages put up by the Poles and Swedes in an attempt to cripple Russia's economy by denying the nation access to sea trade routes. Famine

and drought started to plague the country, and for the first time since his ascension to the throne, Ivan's common people were experiencing nationwide hunger.

If he had still been in the peaceful and intelligent frame of mind with which he had governed Russia during his early rule, Ivan might have addressed these issues. He might have been able to overcome them and restore Russia to the glory of the previous decade. But Ivan was fixated on just one thing, and that was the treachery that the boyars had committed against him. They had made his childhood a living hell and taken away from him the two women that he had truly loved—and now they had given him on a silver platter all the power he needed to pay those cruelties back. He now had the power they had over him when he was a helpless little boy being molested and terrified in his own home.

Ivan started by dividing Russia into two different states: the *Zemshchina* and the *Oprichnina*. The *Zemshchina* was the majority of Russia, ruled over by the boyars under Ivan as it had always been, but the *Oprichnina* was a separate territory, mostly in the northern part of Russia, and within that territory, the boyars had no power. Ivan had absolute control over everything that happened within the *Oprichnina*, and he all but withdrew completely from governing—or even setting foot within—the *Zemshchina*. He refused to communicate with the boyars of the *Zemshchina*, abandoning them to rule the land that they had so greedily wanted and instead focused on building up a new court.

The *Oprichnina* was an unusual move and the brainchild of a mind driven wild by terror. It is universally viewed as evidence that Ivan's mental stability was questionable at best. While he may have been trying to balance out power and bring stability to Russia by forming the *Oprichnina*, it is more likely that Ivan was simply trying to be perfectly certain of his personal safety by effectively dividing his country in half: one part for the boyars and their treacherous ways and the other only for Ivan and the people he trusted, a place where nobody could poison or hurt him again.

In order to enforce the borders of the *Oprichnina* and to protect his own person, Ivan formed a new legion of guards and soldiers, something akin to the secret police of other dictatorial regimes in later centuries. Only these police were everything but secret. Known as the *Oprichniki*, they were a terrifying sight, always dressed in black and riding shining black horses. Attached to the breastplate of his horse, each *Oprichnik* carried the head of a

dead dog, symbolizing his diligence in sniffing out treachery; he also wore a broom, showing that he would sweep away any opposition without effort. They were formidable warriors, hand-picked from the ranks of Russia's best for their excellence and ruthlessness in fighting (as long as they were not descended from any of the noble families), and they were fiercely loyal to Ivan—after all, they knew that the penalty for even suspected treason was torture and death. They knew this because they were the ones who carried out these penalties. Utterly loyal to Ivan's bidding, they rode all over the country, carrying out his orders to pillage, kill, maim, and torture whomever he wanted.

The *Oprichniki* themselves had a reputation for being utterly heartless. Not only did they obey Ivan's orders to carry out unmentionable cruelties, but they also had a bloodthirsty tendency themselves. Given free rein to do as they pleased, they raped and stole wherever they went, often killing innocent people for the simple sport of it. Like shadows across the landscape, they rode in their dark regiments with swift savagery, dealing out sorrow and agony everywhere they went. And with Ivan at their backs, they were untouchable and unaccountable to anyone. As long as they remained loyal to their tsar, they could do as they pleased. In Kurbsky's words, they were “children of darkness.”

It was likely during this period that Ivan started to become known as Ivan the Terrible, even among his own people. For as much as Ivan himself was focused mostly on persecuting the boyars, ordering the deaths of hundreds of them, often with calculated cruelty in symbolic torture and execution rituals, he had failed to consider the effects that this would have on the common people. When the boyars suffered, they made their commoners suffer too; also, the *Oprichniki* failed to make the same distinction that Ivan did between boyars and everyone else, and they meted out the same cruelty to everyone they came across. As a result, thousands of peasants fled the *Oprichnina* and sought refuge either in the *Zemshchina* or even beyond the borders of Russia.

More of them would have fled if they had known what was coming. After five years of raining terror down upon the boyars and the rest of his people, Ivan was only getting started. His greatest atrocity was yet to come.

* * * *

Ivan's horse snorted uneasily, its huge muscles twitching under its rider as it scented the city lying ahead. Snow crunched under its hooves, steam

blooming from its nostrils and curling from its sweating flanks. Ivan spurred it impatiently, keeping it moving through the deep snow. His eyes burned with a fevered paranoia, with the wild anger and hatred that had been growing inside him like a gnarled root. For years, Ivan had been suffering and inflicting that suffering upon his country. And today he would snap. He could feel it. Today he would finally let loose all of that pain and wild agony, and he would destroy, and perhaps it would make him feel somewhat better. His horse made its way over the hill, and Ivan spotted the city ahead; its sprawling mass was surrounded by his soldiers. It was now home to tens of thousands of people, a far cry from the little settlement it had once been when Rurik first made his way to Russia and gave rise to a new dynasty. To Rurik, it had been paradise. To Ivan, it was a target: Novgorod.

The five years since the creation of the *Oprichnina* and his *Oprichniki* had not been easy ones, neither for Russia nor for its tsar. As Ivan rode toward the doomed city, it was still staggering from the blow of a devastating outbreak of plague which had killed as many as 10,000 of its population. The same plague was in the middle of ravaging Moscow itself, taking a thousand lives a day and eventually killing up to one-third of the population. Bodies were heaping up in the streets, and there was nothing that could be done to stop it.

For two years, Russia had also been facing conflict with the Ottoman Empire, a massive power that Russia could not possibly hope to beat with its ruler's sanity on shaky ground and his reputation as a military commander slowly going down the drain in the wake of his failing struggles against Livonia. The Ottoman Turks were determined to dig a canal between the Volga and Don Rivers, and they had already laid siege to some Russian castles to facilitate their plans. It had taken some skillful negotiations from Ivan's diplomats to bring about a peaceful conclusion without major battles, but Russia had certainly felt the pressure of the threat from Turkey.

On the home front, life had not been easy for Ivan either. Marriage with Maria had become unbearable. Ivan Ivanovich and Feodor did not get along with her, the public was now calling her a witch, and the allure of her beauty had long since worn off in the face of her terrible conduct. Ivan was sick of her, and in his fragile mental state, it didn't take much for him to reach a tipping point that made him capable of the unthinkable. To this day, we're not sure exactly how Maria's death in 1569 came about. But it is alleged, and not impossible, that Ivan himself committed the very act of treason that had driven him so wildly insane in the first place. He poisoned his own wife. And

while he was more than likely the guilty party, he used her death as an excuse to enact another round of terrible retribution on the boyars, accusing them of the same treachery they had committed against Anastasia. This time, with his *Oprichniki* willing to carry out any command that he wished, Ivan did not have any limits on his cruelty. He watched with satisfaction as hundreds of people were tortured and killed in a variety of cruel and horrific ways right in front of his eyes.

All of this had taken its toll on him. With every death, with every scream of agony that reached his ears, and with every act of unspeakable brutality that Ivan ordered and then watched with pleasure, his thirst for blood only grew. The circumstances that had so psychologically twisted him as a boy had only worsened, and Ivan was no longer content with maiming small animals or throwing pets from the roof of the castle. No, he needed to see thousands killed now; he needed to hear people scream. It was the only thing that seemed to settle him. The poor little boy that had been so thoroughly disturbed by his childhood had grown up into a monster.

And now, Novgorod was about to experience the full extent of Ivan's brutality and heartlessness. As he rode toward the city, Ivan knew that its clergy had already experienced thefts, executions, and torture for weeks. The surrounding towns had been pillaged and razed to the ground, and now, the population of Novgorod—already decimated by plague and now surrounded by the terrifying *Oprichniki*—could do little except await its horrible fate.

Ivan reined in his horse for a second, staring down at the city. Cold anger burned in his heart toward every living thing lying down there. He had accused its citizens of treason, fearing their defection to Polish Lithuania, his enemy in the Livonian War; it was conveniently located near the Russian border, and there was little to stop it from following in Kurbsky's footsteps and seeking greener pastures with a monarch whose head was screwed on straight. But Novgorod would never have that opportunity. Ivan would destroy it first.

Coldly, Ivan gave the order to charge. He set spurs to his horse, hefting his own weapon, and galloped straight for the city. It is difficult to conceive what was going through his mind at that moment. Was his mind empty and cold like a psychopath, his actions glittering with that icy calculation borne of a total lack of any form of empathy? Or was it tumultuous, chaotic, driven wild by one who had felt too much, who had endured too much pain and became a physical manifestation of that pain, inflicting it on hundreds and thousands of

other people in a desperate bid to escape its oppressive weight? Either way, the next few days of Ivan's life were the bloodiest of his entire reign. Personally leading his *Oprichniki* through the streets of Novgorod, he sought to sow destruction and agony wherever he rode. It was a move similar to the rampages he used to go on as a child, leading his rowdy band of buddies to trample on pedestrians. Except now he was not just a kid with a bunch of naughty friends. He was a tsar at the helm of a legion of vicious warriors ready to do his bidding, and he was out to kill.

To list all the atrocities committed by Ivan in the following days would fill chapters and chapters. To do justice to his victims, most of whom remain nameless and faceless to history as they were simply ordinary people going about innocent and ordinary lives, would be impossible. Women and children were raped. Houses were torched, and in the smoke of their burning, their inhabitants were skinned alive or hung or hacked to pieces by the bloodthirsty *Oprichniki* and their heartless leader. Animals were butchered in the streets alongside their owners. Windows were shattered or torn down, people were thrown into the river and drowned, and men and women were blown up with gunpowder, bits of their burnt and disintegrated corpses left scattered around the streets and trampled by the hooves of the *Oprichniki*'s horses as they chased down other victims. They captured the archbishop, and on Ivan's command, they sewed him into the skin of a freshly hunted bear. Its blood and flesh stuck to him and was smeared all over him, rotting and filthy, as the *Oprichniki* let him go and told him to run, laughing and jeering. The archbishop ran, and Ivan let loose his hunting dogs. They chased him down, and his screams echoed around the mountains as the pack ripped him apart.

It was a period of utter horror and a hell on earth for the inhabitants of Novgorod. Ivan unleashed the full force of his cruelty, and the aftermath was devastating. Over a period of about five weeks, somewhere between 15,000 and 60,000 people were brutally murdered for no good reason. Novgorod, once the pride of Russia, the jewel in its crown would take centuries to recover. Today, it has risen from the ashes of the massacre, survived the World Wars, and remains as a World Heritage Site under the new name of Veliky Novgorod (Novgorod the Great).

But in 1570, there was almost nothing left of it. Once Ivan was done with it, the city had been practically destroyed, most of its inhabitants killed. The full power and limitless cruelty of the *Oprichniki* and their leader had been put on display for the whole of Russia to see, and the smoking ruins of Novgorod

were proof.

We can only speculate at how much more destruction may have taken place had the *Oprichniki* been allowed to continue. Yet they would remain for only two more years before meeting a foe that they could not hope to beat—and falling out of favor with Ivan as a result of their failure.

ıpter 12 – The Failure of the Oprichniki

The Crimean Tatars were coming, and Ivan knew that there was almost nothing he could do.

Heading his *Oprichniki*, Ivan watched in horror as the massive force of Tatars headed straight for him. They were only a few miles away from Moscow, within a day's march of the capital, and Ivan was never supposed to have engaged with his enemy. He had led his handful of *Oprichniki* out more as a show of solidarity than with any goal of actually doing battle; the *Zemshchina* force sent out ahead of him was supposed to do all of the real fighting. Ivan preferred to kill things that did not fight back. But now, he was faced with a Tatar army 40,000 strong, led by the formidable Tatar Khan Devlet I Giray. The *Zemshchina* force that had been sent to guard the river Oka against the approaching horde had failed. Russian traitors, desperate to see anyone but Ivan ruling over their country, had smuggled the entire Crimean force across the river without any opposition, and now they were flooding across the landscape, heading directly for Ivan and his little army.

The spring countryside was pitch black, teeming with the vast numbers of Tatars. Their swift, shaggy ponies could gallop for miles, bearing archers whose accuracy and speed were a deadly combination; they could reload much faster than cannons and approach and retreat with remarkable speed and agility, making them lethal even when faced with more modern weapons. Looking back over the black-clad riders on their shining black horses, Ivan saw fear in their eyes. Suddenly the force that had so easily razed Novgorod almost to the ground no longer seemed so mighty. The *Oprichniki* had never tasted real war. Within the safe confines of the *Oprichnina*, they had met with no opposition, instead persecuting unarmed peasants and panicking commoners. They were neither trained for war nor seasoned by it, and Ivan knew, with sudden clarity, that to lead them against the Tatars would be nothing short of suicide.

While Kurbsky would be quick to chalk up Ivan's next action to nothing but cowardice, the tsar was out of options. He knew that the Tatars would mow down his little force as if it had never existed. Wheeling his horse around, he shouted to his army to retreat. They didn't need to be told twice. Setting heels to their horses, the *Oprichniki* fled as fast as their horses could carry them. They rode hard to the north, having to take a detour around Moscow since they knew it was the true target of the Tatar invasion. Ivan knew that most of

his army was fighting in Livonia; the majority of the *strelski*—the standing army—that remained in Russia was now waiting around on the banks of the Oka, their enemy having long since gone. The garrison that was left in Moscow was a skeleton of a skeleton crew, decimated by plague and the demands of the Livonian War. Only 6,000 men strong, it didn't stand a chance against the Tatars. Moscow was going to fall, and Ivan knew it, but he did little to try to stop the inevitable disaster. He just spurred his horse on and rode as hard as he could for Aleksandrovskaya Sloboda.

The tsar sheltered there in his hunting lodge-turned-fortress as the Tatars continued, inexorably and relentlessly, toward Moscow. The hapless commander of the Moscow garrison had little option but to lead his army out, knowing that it was doomed before the fighting began. The Tatars barely slowed down. Crushing the Muscovite army effortlessly, they pushed onward, reaching the suburbs of the city almost unopposed. The hundreds of thousands of civilians inside Moscow were helpless. They could only watch as Devlet I Giray had the nearest houses soaked in oil and then touched a blazing torch to the slick surfaces. Flame after flame rushed into the air as the Tatars galloped down the streets to screams and panic, lighting up the houses. Bedrooms and kitchens, backyards and stables went up in flames; the water barrels on the roofs that Ivan had implemented decades ago did little to slow down the fiery chaos. When a sudden wind came out of nowhere, it seized the fire and flung it up toward the Kremlin. Roaring, the fire was whipped up into a frenzy, devouring whole blocks at a time as it rushed upon the teeth of the wind. Panicking citizens flung themselves into the river or hid in stone buildings, which collapsed under the heat of the fire and the force of the wind it had created. They perished in the thousands, and so did those who drowned in the river or were not lucky enough to escape the flames.

In six hours, most of Moscow was destroyed. The palace had burned to the ground, and acres of suburbs were reduced to nothing but ashes. Thousands of people—guesses range around 60,000—had died. The tragedy of the Great Fire of 1547 had been repeated, except this time, it was magnified and made much worse by the fact that this was no sad accident. This could have been prevented, but treachery and the failure of the *Oprichniki* had left the Tatars unopposed, and Moscow had to pay the price. The betrayal that Ivan had always feared had taken place, but his people had paid for it while he was safely tucked away in his fortress at Sloboda. As for the Tatars, they disappeared, carried by their fleet-footed little ponies back to the land from

whence they came. Their losses could not have been significant.

The 1571 Fire of Moscow dwarfed the Great Fire of 1547, and like that early disaster, it finally spurred Ivan into action. Realizing that the *Oprichniki* had failed to protect him or Russia from outside invasions—or from the treachery that had made the Crimean raid so successful—Ivan decided that they were more trouble than they were worth. Over the next year, he would continue to mull over this decision, but in 1572, the *Oprichniki* was disbanded and the *Oprichnina* was abolished. In an ironic twist that the senior *Oprichnik* officers could never have seen coming, Ivan executed them for failing to protect him and his capital.

As for the Crimean Tatars, they came back the next summer, aiming to repeat their raid of 1571 and perhaps even to invade and claim Moscow instead of merely burning it. However, they were met with a strong Russian army led by Prince Mikhail Vorotynsky. Despite the fact that the prince only commanded half the number of men that the Crimean leader did, when they met on the banks of the Lopasnya, a week-long battle ensued that would take a heavy toll on both sides. Ivan himself was holed up in Novgorod at the time and gave orders to Vorotynsky, but he did not actively participate in the battle itself. It ended in a decisive victory for the Russians, and the Tatars were beaten back to such an extent that neither they nor their Turkish allies would attempt any more raids on Russia during Ivan's reign.

Vorotynsky was welcomed back as a hero of the war—perhaps with too much enthusiasm by a people desperate for a true hero. He was greatly celebrated for about a year before Ivan grew jealous of his popularity, accused him of infringing on the throne, and personally tortured him to death.

* * * *

Now in his forties, Ivan had become a widower for the second time in 1569 after the death of Maria. This time, he would take two years to replace her. Perhaps he was reluctant to return to matrimony after his unhappy union with Maria, or perhaps he was simply too busy causing chaos within his own country. Either way, in 1571, he finally settled on his third wife. This time, he was once again allured by youth and beauty and once again avoided marrying into any of the boyar families that he so detested.

Marfa Vasilevna Sobakina was the nineteen-year-old daughter of a merchant. After an extensive bride-show, Ivan had chosen twelve finalists; Marfa, he decided eventually, was the most beautiful of them all. He must have been

aware that she would be his last wife as the Orthodox Church stipulated that only three marriages would be allowed, regardless of what happened to the previous spouses. His wedding day with Marfa was supposed to be his last.

Sadly, however, their union was doomed even before it began. Marfa's mother had never dreamed that her young daughter would someday become the Tsaritsa of Russia; traditionally, only princesses and those of the noblest blood were chosen to marry grand princes. It was only because of Ivan's abhorrence of the boyar families that a common girl like Marfa had been chosen, and her family suddenly found itself elevated to a nearly royal status. Marfa's mother's imagination ran wild. She imagined one of her grandchildren upon the throne of Russia one day, and so as Marfa prepared for the wedding ceremony, her mother started to give her doses of an elixir that she'd been told would make her daughter more fertile.

Tragically, the elixir was far from a fertility potion. Instead, it was something deadly—a poison whose identity has since been lost. The more of the potion that Marfa drank, the more the weight melted off her, her flesh shrinking on her bones until she could barely stand on her wedding day, a hollow-eyed skeleton of the bright girl that Ivan had chosen. Nonetheless, the ceremony went ahead, even though Marfa swayed where she stood at the altar. Ivan took her home to the impregnable fortress of Aleksandrovskaya Sloboda, certain that she would be safe with him inside those formidable walls and surrounded only by hand-picked attendants of whose loyalty Ivan was absolutely certain. Yet it was not enough. The damage had already been done, and Marfa was not safe from whatever lethal substance was eating her up from the inside out. Within days of their wedding, she died.

Ivan went wild. He immediately accused the boyars of poisoning Marfa, although they would have been utter fools to even attempt such a thing. Once again, the boyars faced a wave of executions and tortures as Ivan sent out his *Oprichniki* on their last rampage before they were disbanded. Even the family of Anastasia, his beloved first wife, was not safe. Her brother was impaled and killed for the crime of poisoning Marfa, even though it is extremely unlikely that he actually committed the crime.

By now, such cruelty was second nature to Ivan, automatic and effortless, especially with the *Oprichniki* at his disposal; yet even after they were disbanded in 1572—about a year after Marfa's death—Ivan continued to act with suspicion and hatred toward those closest to him. His people felt a surge of hope when he abolished the *Oprichnina* (even banning the use of the very

word *Oprichnina*), thinking that perhaps their ruler had returned to some form of lucidity. Yet Ivan would soon prove that the end of the *Oprichnina* was not the end of his madness. It was just another step forward in his slow and unstoppable slide into total insanity.

* * * *

Soon after the end of the *Oprichnina* and having recently married his fourth wife, Anna Alexeievna Koltovskaya, Ivan seemed to be lost. Without his *Oprichniki* to sow chaos at his bidding and without the loyal followers that had made up the *Oprichnina* around him, Ivan didn't know what to do with himself. He had been able to occupy himself for a little while by persecuting random people whom he believed were to blame for the death of Marfa, but now, he felt directionless. In fact, he was tired of tsardom, tired of the constant worry over his life and the lives of those closest to him, and tired—it may be speculated—of life. For all the atrocities Ivan had committed, not a single one had managed to make him happy. He had done whatever he'd wanted, and nothing had made him feel better. He continued to be a profoundly disturbed and deeply depressed individual, and even at the relatively young age of forty-two, he had straggling gray hairs and deep wrinkles that made him look twice his own age.

Ivan was sick of ruling over Russia, regardless of how poorly he had been doing so for the past several years. So, he did what he had tried to do almost a decade ago: He abdicated. Only this time, instead of leaving the throne to the boyars, he decided to place a new tsar of his own choosing upon the throne that he didn’t want. Despite the fact that his son and heir, Ivan Ivanovich, was already eighteen years old—a little older than Ivan himself had been when he had been crowned Tsar of All the Russias—Ivan elected not to place him on the throne. Instead, he chose a fairly obscure former Tatar general named Simeon Bekboelatovitch.

Little is known about Bekboelatovitch's “reign” other than the fact that it appears that it was not official. He was nothing but a puppet in Ivan's hands, a hapless—and probably terrified—individual who did little other than keep the seat of the throne warm for Ivan's inevitable return. For a year, Ivan lived at one of his country estates in luxury and relaxation, although what exactly was going through his mind at that point in time is impossible to even guess at. Frequently, he would ride to Moscow to pay homage to his new “tsar,” bowing down before Bekboelatovitch and showing him submission and loyalty. Russia teetered on the brink of disaster, its government having never

been more uncertain than now. As frightening as Ivan had been in recent years, it was a relief for most Russians when he suddenly grew tired of this charade and reclaimed the throne. Surprisingly, Bekboelatovitch was not harmed. He was given lands and a noble title, and he was allowed to carry on with his life while Ivan resumed the throne.

The tsar had now reached the last decade of his reign. He had both caused and endured an almost incomprehensible amount of suffering, but the worst of it all was still to come. Ivan's family was in danger, and this time, it was from the patriarch himself.

ıpter 13 – Two Killings

Illustration VIII: Ivan the Terrible and His Son Ivan on 16 November 1581, *an emotive depiction of the death of Tsarevich Ivan Ivanovich by Ilya Repin*

The 1570s were a tumultuous decade for Ivan. Starting with the Massacre of Novgorod, continuing with the Fire of Moscow and then the end of the *Oprichnina*, and followed by the death of Marfa, Ivan's circumstances were as unstable and wild as his mood swings. And as the decade wore on, things would only get worse.

In 1572, shortly after Marfa's untimely demise, Ivan went on to marry his fourth wife, Anna Koltovskaya. This union was not accepted by the Church and only barely accepted by the people when Ivan appeased them by saying that he had not had the time to consummate his marriage to Marfa due to her sickness and rapid death. Either way, it appears that Ivan was past caring what the Church or anyone else thought of him as long as nobody was poisoning his wives. Anna herself was, as usual for Ivan's wives, not of high birth; she must have been a young woman or even a girl when Ivan married her, for while her date of birth has been lost, she would outlive Ivan, dying in 1626. However, their marriage would not survive as long as Anna did. She

proved to be infertile. After two years of marriage, in 1574, Ivan tired of her. Instead of poisoning her as he likely did with his second wife Maria, he simply sent her off to a convent to become a nun. She took the veil as Sister Daria and may later have been canonized as Saint Daria in the Eastern Orthodox Church.

Details on what happened next in Ivan's marital life are sketchy. He married again in 1575, even though this wedding was most certainly frowned upon by the Church; this wife, another Anna, did not last long before meeting the same end as Anna Koltovskaya. Anna the second, however, may have been murdered in the convent—most of the details about her life have since been lost to the creeping fog of time.

Ivan's sixth wife, Vasilisa Melentyeva, most likely did not exist. A figment of 19th-century imaginations, Vasilisa allegedly arrived in Moscow as a widow seeking shelter and became Ivan's wife. She fell in love with a prince, and when Ivan found out, the prince was impaled and Vasilisa sent to a convent. No historical evidence can be found that points toward Vasilisa's existence; her story was more than likely fabricated. She was supposedly Ivan's wife for a brief few months during 1579.

Maria Dolgorukaya is also likely to be nothing more than a legend. Fabled to be Ivan's seventh wife, she was also accused of infidelity, but her story does not end as peacefully as Vasilisa's. Instead of being sent to the convent, legend has it that Maria was drowned. Her existence has not been confirmed.

Finally, in 1581, Ivan married for the eighth time—and this time his spouse actually did exist. Maria Nagaya was spared the fate of her predecessors when she produced a son for Ivan in 1582, a little boy who was named Dmitri.

Dmitri was a small piece of good news. But the events of the previous year of 1581 in Ivan's family had been bad—very, very bad.

* * * *

Since retaking the throne after the brief and peculiar reign of the Tatar general, Ivan had been largely inactive in affairs of the state. He made a few attempts to reform something similar to the *Oprichnina* in a bid to protect himself, but none had been as notorious as the *Oprichnina* itself, and the *Oprichniki* would never come together again. Apart from this, Ivan all but withdrew himself from the duties that came with the throne. Yet there was one aspect of his reign that could not be ignored: the Livonian War.

Ever since Lithuania had become involved in the war, the Russian forces had been suffering continual defeats. For two decades now, the opposing armies had been struggling in a drawn-out series of skirmishes and battles that had cost thousands of lives. Refugees fleeing the war had poured into Russia and even into Moscow itself, bringing with them horrendous outbreaks of the plague. Russia could not support the vast number of mouths it now suddenly had to feed, and famine resulted. Yet Ivan refused to engage in peace talks with the Livonians. Instead, he allowed the fighting to drag on.

This was a terrible mistake. Once Livonia had been won back entirely, Ivan's enemies set their sights on a greater target: Russia itself. They knew that trying to negotiate peace meant nothing now—Ivan would stubbornly continue trying to wage this war until something gave. Invasion was the only option. In 1581, the Lithuanian army and its allies laid siege to Pskov, a Russian city not far from the border of Livonia. Despite the fact that it was defended by a large number of seasoned *strelski* soldiers, Pskov soon found itself struggling to survive the siege. Its commanders sent desperate messages to Moscow, begging for help to liberate the city.

If it was up to Ivan himself, the cries would have fallen on deaf ears. Instead, they reached his son, Ivan Ivanovich. Ivanovich had always been close with his father, and he had spent a lot of time with him—including participating in the Massacre of Novgorod when he was only a teenage boy—but when he heard about the trouble that Pskov was in, he decided that he would have to disagree with Ivan's decision to do nothing.

When Ivanovich first started to argue with him over the fate of Pskov, Ivan was heartbroken. His son had been his closest and most constant friend over the years; the one person that he had not lost. Anastasia had been poisoned decades ago, Kurbsky had betrayed him, and his wives had been a long string of failure after failure. But Ivanovich—he alone remained, and he alone was precious and treasured in Ivan's heart. He had stayed with his father despite his madness, and Ivan loved him more than anything else in the world.

This is not to say that Ivan had treated young Ivanovich well. He had married the boy off to a suitable young Swedish lady named Virginia Eriksdotter when Ivanovich was only a teenager, but when the couple failed to produce any children within a couple of years, Ivan promptly condemned his daughter-in-law to be imprisoned in a convent. Ivanovich's second wife, Praskovia Solova, was similarly incapable of producing a child. Ivan's solution to her infertility was as simple as it had always been for his own

wives; off to the nunnery she went, and Ivan quickly found his son another girl to marry. Ivanovich was heartbroken at having his spouses so brutally stripped away from him, but he knew better than to argue with his father. As much as he missed his previous two wives, he meekly agreed to marry Yelena Sheremeteva. A few months Ivanovich's senior, Yelena was luckier than his other wives had been. It was with great relief that the young couple discovered in October 1581 that Yelena was pregnant with Ivanovich's first child.

Now, at last, Ivanovich hoped he and his wife would be left alone to enjoy their marriage and children together. But it was not to be. Ivan's insanity was about to take a terrible swing for the worse, a swing that would not only change Ivanovich's life: It would take it.

* * * *

Yelena was terrified of her father-in-law.

She hardly dared to move as she sat in the same room as he did. Even though she was almost too scared to look at him, she found herself sneaking glances to make sure that he was still sitting quietly in his chair. He was going bald on the top of his head; what was left of his hair hung down around his shoulders, white with stress and ragged where he had torn some of it away in one of his wild moods. His beard was similarly ruined, and his face was deeply lined, a mask of suffering amid the finery of his clothing. His eyes were the worst though. They were sunken deep into the dark sockets of his skull so that they were little more than a black glitter somewhere among the shadows in his face, their expression unreadable. His entire posture seemed to emanate hatred and despair. It was like sitting with a black hole of emotional energy that sucked at Yelena's vibrant youth.

She had not been given a choice in marrying Ivanovich. Arranged marriage was the only fate awaiting most young noblewomen of the period, and as the daughter of a boyar, Yelena would have been expecting something along these lines to happen to her eventually. Yet she dreaded the very idea of becoming part of Tsar Ivan's household. He had murdered thousands of boyars; it's more than likely that members of Yelena's own family had succumbed to his wrath. And now she was sitting in the same room as he was, trying not to attract his attention.

But it was already too late. Suddenly, his mood snapping like a cracked whip, Ivan flew to his feet. Yelena cowered in place, her hands subconsciously

moving over her pregnant belly, instinctively protecting her unborn baby as Ivan's mouth opened and launched an angry tirade that left Yelena feeling stunned. He had taken sudden and terrible objection to the clothes that Yelena was wearing; despite the wintry November weather outside, it was warm inside the palace, and Yelena had dressed lightly in accordance with the temperature. Yet something about her clothes had triggered Ivan's paranoia. He ranted at her, telling her that she was dressed promiscuously, that she was planning to cheat on his oldest son. Perhaps some of Ivan's fears that Ivanovich himself was infertile—not the wives that he had sent to the convents—came to the surface now as he accused Yelena of unspeakable things to her young ears. Panicking, Yelena protested that she had done no wrong, but Ivan could not be pacified. He flew at her, seizing her in a surprisingly strong grip considering his sickly appearance, and threw her to the floor. Yelena fell with an impact that almost stunned her. Showing no mercy, Ivan started to kick her, pummeling her body ruthlessly. All that Yelena could do was to curl up over her belly in a desperate attempt to protect her baby and scream as loudly as she could.

Ivanovich heard the screams. Rushing from elsewhere in the palace, he burst into the room to behold an utterly horrifying sight. His beautiful young wife was curled up on the floor, her hands thrown up to protect her face. Towering over her, his face twisted in a senseless anger that was baser and more brutal than that of the most savage animal, stood Ivan. He was kicking her, beating her, striking her with the butt of his scepter. And as Ivanovich stared in horror, he saw blood soaking into Yelena's skirt, running down over her thighs and seeping into the carpet.

Ivanovich snapped. He had not been given to the same fits of anger as his father, but his temper was lost now, and he flew into the room, shouting at the top of his lungs. “You sent my first wife to a convent for no reason!” Grabbing Ivan, he yanked him back, pulling him off Yelena. Placing himself between his wife and his father, Ivanovich went on. “You did the same with my second. And now you strike the third!” He gestured furiously at Yelena where she began to sit up. Her bleeding was so profuse from between her legs that her dress was already soaked through with blood. Ivanovich's voice was an agonized whisper. “Causing the death of the son she holds in her womb.”

Yelena raised a blood- and tear-stained face to her husband. They both knew what had just happened: Yelena had suffered a miscarriage of her and Ivanovich's child.

It is uncertain exactly when the following events took place. It may have been days later after Ivanovich had helped Yelena to her chambers and a physician had the chance to confirm that she had, indeed, lost her baby. It may have been in that very moment while Yelena lay bleeding on the carpet and Ivanovich stood over her in trembling rage. Either way, Ivan and Ivanovich began to argue. The topic of their shouting rants turned from Yelena and Ivanovich's other wives to Pskov and Ivanovich's vociferous opinion that Ivan should have liberated it long ago. Furious and heated with emotion, Ivan accused his son of plotting a rebellion. Ivanovich passionately declared his loyalty but held firm: Pskov needed help, and leaving it to the Livonians was heartless and pointless.

Finally, Ivan lost his temper entirely. Screaming incoherently in fury, he swung his iron scepter, a deadly instrument that had killed many an unlucky subject. This time, its target was his son. The point of the scepter thudded home to Ivanovich's temple. There was a terrible crack, a sound of shattering and crunching bone. A look of surprise and agony crossed the young man's face for a moment, and then, his knees buckled, and he crumpled to the floor.

The horror of what he had just done struck Ivan immediately, snapping him out of his psychotic rage. With a howl of remorse, he flung himself to the ground, frantically scooping his boy into his arms. Ivanovich was limp, blood pouring down the side of his face from a wound in his temple. His head looked dented, crushed where the scepter had struck home. His movements shaking with fear, Ivan tried to stop the bleeding, pressing his bony hand to the wound. He cuddled Ivanovich against him, begging him to live. “May I be damned!” he moaned. “I've killed my son. I've killed my son!”

His words were not untrue. Ivanovich's skull was shattered. He would linger for a few more days in a coma, lying as still as death in his chamber. Finally, on November 19th, 1581, Tsarevich Ivan Ivanovich of Russia died.

Ivan's grief over the death of Ivanovich equaled his feelings after Anastasia died. He screamed and howled, overcome with remorse for what he had done in his fit of senseless rage. When he saw Ivanovich's coffin for the first time, he lost all reason. Seizing its edge, he beat his head against it until his skin broke and blood poured down his face. Then he continued to scream, staggering around the palace like a wounded animal, unable to comprehend or feel anything other than his terrible grief. His own cruelty and inability to control his emotions had come back to bite him in the most agonizing way possible.

ıpter 14 – The Legacy of Ivan “The Terrible”

Illustration IX: A sculpture of Ivan by Mark Antokolski

Stripped naked and used for target practice by the *Oprichniki*. Sewn in a bearskin and torn apart by hungry dogs. Doused in alternating boiling and freezing water until the skin ruptured. Hanging. Drowning. Boiling in a cauldron. Ribs plucked out by red-hot tongs. Decapitation. Trampled by wild ponies. Struck by a scepter. These are just some of the gruesome ways that Ivan's victims had been murdered, from the hapless peasants of Novgorod to

the hated boyars to his own child. But Ivan himself, ironically, would be spared any kind of a gruesome death. His own demise would be strangely peaceful—although possibly self-inflicted in a strangely roundabout way.

Ivan was fifty-four years old, and ever since the death of his son, he had been more or less simply waiting to die. The Livonian War had been lost; Maria Nagaya had given birth to Ivan's last child, Dmitri, in 1582; and now, in the year 1584, Ivan had become a sickly and shambling shell of the tyrant that he once was. He was still capable of ordering great violence, but he could now no longer dispense any of it himself. Disease had seeped into his very bones; his joints were failing him even though he was not an old man yet, and he had to be carried on a litter everywhere that he wished to go. Even his skin was bursting open to reveal sores that oozed a foul-smelling pus.

Russia itself was on the verge of economic collapse. The Livonian War had been incredibly expensive. It had sucked the economy dry, a process expedited by the droughts, famines, and plagues that the nation had endured and made worse by the fact that—with Ivan sick and the boyars decimated by his persecution—there was little in the way of a government in Russia. The only flicker of good news during that time was the fact that one brave soldier named Yermak Timofeevich, a former brigand, had taken up his sword and sought a new frontier on the border of Russia and Siberia. Working for the Stroganov family, who had been colonizing the barren area, Yermak had succeeded in driving out the Mongols who had then occupied Siberia. He conquered the area for Russia and became a hero in the eyes of the people.

Ivan honored Yermak with a title and the Stroganovs with gifts of land, but the good news did little to distract him from the reality that he knew was coming ever closer. His death was not far off, and he knew it. Somehow, he managed to scrape together enough rational thinking to write his will, which was a grim document in and of itself. With Ivan dead, the throne of Russia would fall to the mentally handicapped Feodor, but there was no other choice; Dmitri was only two years old, and Ivan couldn't bear for the little boy to suffer the same fate that he had as the Grand Prince of Moscow without a father, tortured in the Kremlin by the boyars. He left the principality of Uglich to Dmitri instead, the same territory that had been ruled over by Ivan's deaf-mute brother Yuri before his death several years ago. There were no two ways about it—Feodor would have to become the tsar, whether he was suitable for the position or not.

That was where Ivan's rationality ended. The fears that had always followed

him were closing in on him now, tightening around him like a hungry circle of starving dogs, ready to rip him to shreds the way that his own pack of hounds had torn Andrei Shuisky limb from limb and given Ivan his first taste for murder. Now even murder could not take his mind off the fact that he knew he was dying, and he was scared—scared and alone. For the first time, Ivan turned his back on the church. Seeking help from a darker quarter, he sent for sixty Lapp magicians to work their witchcraft on him in a bid to save him.

Of course, the magicians could do nothing to help the tsar feel better. According to legend, however, they could predict his death: March 18th, 1584. They gave this information to Bogdan Belsky, then Ivan's friend and favorite. Belsky, however, was hoping that he would inherit the throne, so he kept the information quiet. Instead, he attempted to take the tsar's mind off his impending death by keeping him occupied with what recreational activities he could engage in considering his infirm state.

As a boy, Ivan had hunted down peasants in the street and ridden wildly through the countryside. Raping and pillaging had been his idea of fun. Now, however, he could no longer walk, let alone ride. He was left with little to do except play chess.

It was March 18th, 1584, the date that the Lapp magicians had said would be Ivan's last day on this earth. Belsky was uneasy, but he tried his best to hide it. Perhaps the magicians had been wrong after all. As Belsky waited for the tsar in his bedchamber, he could hear Ivan singing in the bath; he had just been given his medicine, and he seemed to be feeling better that day.

When Ivan was helped into his room, Belsky noticed that his cheeks had some color to them. He seemed cheerful enough, dressed comfortably in a loose gown, and when he sat down on his bed, he called for a game of chess instead of going straight to bed as he usually did. The chessboard was brought out, and Ivan asked Belsky to play a game with him.

What happened next is still not entirely clear. Some accounts say that Ivan had only managed to place the chess pieces on the board when the attack seized him; others report that he and Belsky played a full game and that Belsky had won, prompting Ivan to rise from his bed in a fit of thoughtless rage. Either way, as Ivan handled the pieces, Belsky noticed that he seemed to be fumbling with them a little, as if he didn't have control over his own hands. Perhaps his speech slurred somewhat, too; his face may have begun to

droop, and then, with a suddenness that shocked Belsky and the other attendants in the room, Ivan collapsed. He flopped onto the bed, his heavy body causing the pillows to bounce as it crashed down onto the mattress, a limp weight. Belsky shot to his feet. Ivan had been fainting more and more often over the years, a symptom of his numerous diseases, but Belsky could see that this time was different. The tsar's face was ashen; his breaths came in rasping, rattling gasps, and his limbs twitched wildly as vomit started to trickle from the corner of his mouth.

Panic filled the room. Belsky swung around, bellowing for Ivan's physicians and apothecaries to be brought. People scurried in and out among Belsky's shouted orders as Ivan gasped and choked on the bed, strangled noises dribbling from his slack mouth. The smells of bodily fluids filled the air, followed by the herbal scents of the remedies that the physicians brought in as they rushed to tend to the tsar. Sadly, with no other method to administer the medicine except orally, all the physicians likely could have done was help Ivan choke to death faster. After a few minutes of horror, Ivan gave a last, agonized gasp and then stopped. Silence fell in the room, and when the attending physician looked up, he was pale. Everyone knew at once that Ivan was dead. The first Tsar of All the Russias, the terror of the boyars, the scourge of Novgorod, was gone from this world forever.

* * * *

Ivan's cause of death was most likely a stroke brought on, perhaps, by the stress of losing his chess game. Speculations that he was poisoned by his enemies appear to have been unfounded; although an excavation and investigation of his body in the 1960s revealed a fairly high concentration of mercury in his tissues, this was a common remedy at the time used to treat arthritic joints. It was also used for syphilis, which may have contributed to his death as well.

Ivan had wished to become a monk before his death in the same way as Vasili, his father, had, but it was so sudden that he never had the chance. Instead, a well-meaning clergyman dressed his dead body in a monk's habit and renamed him Iona, giving Ivan his wish a few minutes too late.

Thousands of people all across Russia would have been elated to hear that Ivan was gone. Even his wife Maria could hardly have been blamed for feeling relief over his death, and it was certainly a great relief to the boyars who could finally rest from the persecution they had been enduring for

decades. When the news reached the convent where Daria, formerly Ivan's wife Anna, had been sent, she must have felt a sense of satisfaction that the man who had so mistreated her was gone at last. But one person was utterly devastated by his death, and that was his son Feodor. He came into the chamber to find his father lying there then fell onto the bed beside him. Hugging the cold body of his father to his own infirm, warm, living flesh, he cried inconsolably. Feodor may have been a grown man, but he had the mental faculties of a child; he must have known about his father's atrocities, but all he cared about in that moment was the fact that his dad was gone.

If Feodor had known what was to come, he would have wept all the more. Despite a regent of four advisers that Ivan had appointed before his death, Feodor's reign was to be an ignominious one; helpless to do anything to stop the decline of his father's empire, Feodor could do little but watch as Russia descended into chaos.

As for Ivan himself, his body was laid in an open coffin to be viewed by the masses. Even though he had been a terrible tyrant, the sight was enough to move many of his people to tears. Ivan had been tsar for thirty-seven years—most of Russia's people had never known another emperor, and they feared the time that was yet to come.

Ivan's body was laid to rest at last in the Cathedral of the Archangel in Moscow. His grave was side by side with that of his own son, Tsarevich Ivan. And there they lie still, the father who had killed his son and the young man whose death would result in the decline of Russia, the last testament to the rage and heartbreak that filled the life of Ivan Vasilyevich, Tsar of All the Russias.

ıclusion

Even after his death, Ivan would continue to cause controversy. His very name has been cause for confusion; although he was most certainly what we would call a terrible monarch by modern standards, his Russian name is Ivan Grozny. “Grozny” translates best into the original use of the English word “terrible”: to inspire terror. It was only after Ivan became widely known as “the Terrible” that the word “terrible” took on its modern-day connotations of badness or evil. “Grozny” would today translate into “fearsome” or “awe-inspiring.”

Yet there is no arguing that Ivan's reign was a time of terror, a *terrible* time indeed for most Russians, specifically the boyar families. The evil that he committed is almost incomprehensible. Exactly how many people he was directly responsible for murdering is difficult to assess, but it is certainly in the thousands. Perhaps in the tens of thousands. Perhaps more.

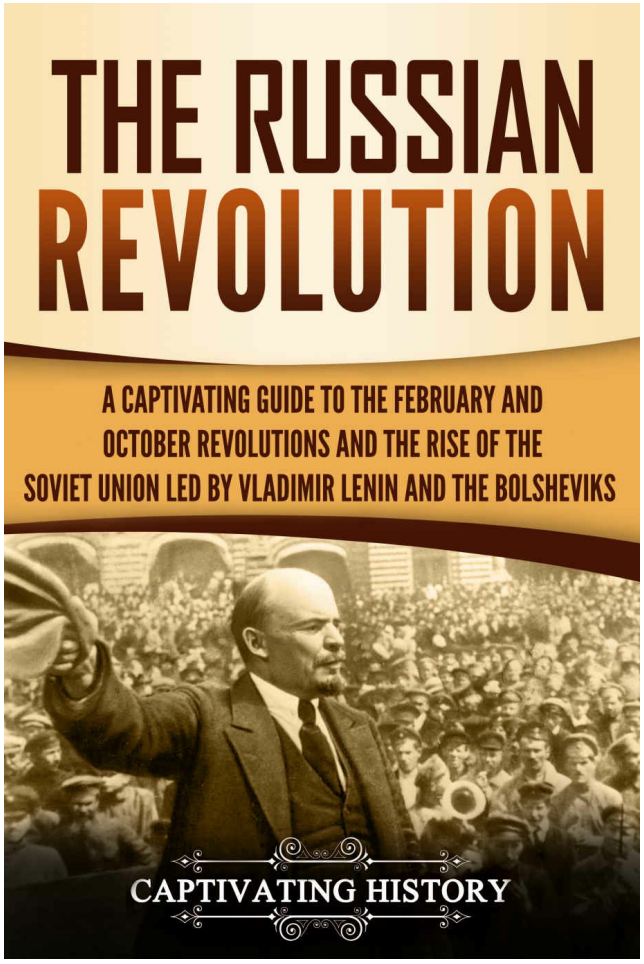
Equally incomprehensible, however, is the suffering that Ivan had to endure as a child. His early years were characterized by luxury and security; as a small child, he would have known that he would be the Grand Prince of Moscow one day and that he would have everything he could possibly want. He would be the most powerful person in the length and breadth of Russia. But the brutal deaths of both his parents plunged his life into perfect darkness. Trying desperately to survive, to protect his deaf-mute brother, and to escape the warring boyars that were so determined to mistreat him, Ivan was just a little kid all alone. The scars that that time left on his psyche would haunt him forever, and when Anastasia died as horribly as she did, it left a raw wound that never quite healed.

And neither did the wounds that Ivan inflicted on Russia. He had caused its economy to fall apart during his own reign, and the fact that he had killed his heir would lead to even greater disaster a few years later. Feodor's reign marked the end of the Rurikid dynasty. He died childless in 1598, and his younger half-brother Dmitri had already died suspiciously a few years earlier. There was no heir to the Russian throne. This precipitated an era of such chaos and economic collapse that even Ivan's reign could not compare to. It would become known as the Time of Troubles, and it only came to an end when Mikhail Romanov—a descendant of Anastasia's family—was made tsar in 1613. This was the start of the Romanov dynasty which lasted for a little over three hundred years.

Ivan the Terrible was a murderer. He was a rapist, a killer, a dictator, a tyrant, an appalling monarch, and, some would say, a monster. Yet his monstrosity stemmed from agony, his violence from fear. Ivan was a frightening presence and a blight on the face of Russian history, but he was also, above all, a human being. His story is not some horror novel but a cautionary tale about the potential power of child abuse. As a kid, Ivan was just a little boy who was being treated badly. But as an adult, he became a looming threat to all of Russia.

Part 3: The Russian Revolution

A Captivating Guide to the February and October Revolutions and the Rise of the Soviet Union Led by Vladimir Lenin and the Bolsheviks


THE RUSSIAN REVOLUTION
A CAPTIVATING GUIDE TO THE FEBRUARY AND OCTOBER REVOLUTIONS AND THE RISE OF THE SOVIET UNION LED BY VLADIMIR LENIN AND THE BOLSHEVIKS
CAPTIVATING HISTORY

Introduction

The Russian Revolution of 1917 was a monumental event in global history, and its 100th anniversary, in 2017, was commemorated around the world. While attitudes towards Lenin and the establishment of the world's first communist state by the Bolshevik Party are divided, the fact that it was a major historical event is undeniable. In many ways, the centennial was far more subdued in Russia, which regards the revolution as a traumatic event that divided the country and is keen to promote a sense of national unity. Despite this, historians from Russia and across the world have published books marking the anniversary and it is clear that the Russian Revolution remains of interest to the general public to this day.

The Russian Revolution of 1917—perhaps more accurately the revolutions of 1917—were a series of complex events involving a large number of key individuals. Some of these individuals, such as Kerensky, Lenin, and Trotsky, are at the heart of the narrative. Others, such as Kornilov, emerge briefly and prominently and then fade away. This book will explain the motivations of individuals and the causes behind the chain of events that led to the downfall of the Romanov monarchy all the way to the elevation of Lenin as the head of the Russian government. By doing so, it aims to cast doubt on the belief that Lenin's rise to power was inevitable, at the same time highlighting the key role Lenin played throughout 1917 to influence events.

Note on Dates

In 1917, Russia used the Old Style or Julian Calendar, which is thirteen days behind the New Style or Gregorian Calendar. In February 1918, as part of the reforms to modernize Russia, Lenin's government switched from the Old Style to New Style Calendar.

Dates in this book before Lenin's reform are given in the Old Style. Dates given after February 1918 are provided in the New Style. While this is not particularly consistent, it is a standard commonly used by historians writing about revolutionary Russia.

Chapter 1 – Twilight of the Tsars

On 20 July 1914, a large crowd gathered on Saint Petersburg's Palace Square in front of the Winter Palace. On the balcony stood Nicholas II, Emperor and Tsar of All the Russias, in a military uniform glistening with service decorations. The previous day, Kaiser Wilhelm II of Germany, the Tsar's cousin, had issued a declaration of war against Russia and France. In response, the Russian Tsar announced before the assembled masses that Russia was prepared to defend herself against enemy aggression, vowing to drive the Germans out of Russian territory. Cries of 'Hurrah' echoed around the crowd, men waved their hats in the air, and the Russian people rallied behind their Tsar, anticipating a swift victory over the insolent Germans.

The fervor for war in Russia, as elsewhere in Europe, was genuine. Russia had mobilized its army against Austria-Hungary in order to defend its ally Serbia, a fellow Orthodox Slavic nation. Some optimists dreamed that in the ensuing war, Russia would finally manage to capture Constantinople, a foreign policy objective for Russian rulers ever since it fell to the Ottoman Empire in 1453. Although the popularity of the Romanov dynasty was in decline as Russia entered the twentieth century, the old cry of 'For Tsar and Fatherland' once again rang out across Saint Petersburg and the empire. The Tsar remained, in the eyes of many, the embodiment of Russia. The State Duma, Russia's parliament, stopped meeting in order to form a united front to support the war effort. This was no time for petty political arguments.

At the very beginning, the war seemed to go well for Russia. Germany expected it would take six weeks for Russia to fully mobilize its army, during which it expected to have defeated France. Instead, through a gargantuan effort, the Russian army managed to mobilize in a mere ten days. This completely negated the Schlieffen Plan, which had been developed to ensure that Germany would avoid fighting a two-front war against France and Russia. The First and Second Russian Armies under Generals Rennenkampf and Samsonov, more than 300,000 men in total, began to march through eastern Prussia virtually unopposed, throwing the German High Command into panic. The German Eighth Army of 150,000 men was formed under the command of the retired General Paul von Hindenburg, with Erich von Ludendorff as chief of staff.

The rapid mobilization of Russian forces, although impressive, was carried out at a significant cost. The two Russian armies marched separately across difficult terrain and were unable to support each other. Supply trains lagged behind the army. Russian soldiers were not fully equipped as they prepared for battle. Not every soldier in the ranks was issued with a rifle, and unarmed soldiers were expected to pick up the rifles of their comrades who had fallen in battle. Those fortunate men who had rifles did not have enough ammunition. Due to limited firepower, the Russian infantry would be obliged to engage in reckless bayonet charges in an effort to conserve their ammunition and inflict damage on the enemy with cold steel.

Hindenburg and Ludendorff effectively exploited the difficulties the Russian army faced. Faced with the two-pronged Russian attack, the Germans moved corps and divisions from one part of the front to the other by railroad. At the Battle of Tannenberg between 13 and 17 August (26-30 August N.S.), the German command decided to concentrate its resources against the Second Army, which managed to advance quicker than the First Army. Most of Samsonov's Second Army eventually found itself encircled with no line of retreat. On the penultimate day of the battle, Samsonov committed suicide as his men surrendered to the enemy. At the end of the battle, 92,000 Russian soldiers were taken into captivity and almost as many were killed or wounded. Arguably of greater importance were the 350 Russian artillery pieces captured by the Germans.

After annihilating the Second Army, the Germans turned their attention towards Rennenkampf's First Army. Reinforced by two corps from the Western Front, the German Eighth Army attacked Rennenkampf at the Masurian Lakes between 19 August – 2 September (1-15 September N.S.). In this battle the Russians suffered a strategic defeat which forced it to abandon any offensive plans and withdraw from German territory. The Russian army lost 250,000 men as well as a large part of its military equipment.

The setbacks at Tannenberg and the Masurian Lakes were major blows to the Russian military effort. The Russians were forced to retreat five hundred miles, abandoning large stretches of territory in Poland, Belarus, and the Baltic. This proved immensely damaging to morale both in the army and at the home front. In an effort to increase morale, despite the opposition of his ministers, in September 1915 Tsar Nicholas decided to leave his capital and assume command at General Headquarters. By making such a momentous decision, the Tsar was placing responsibility for the war effort into his own

hands.

The Tsar's presence at headquarters appeared to have the desired effect, as the performance of the Russian army improved substantially in 1916. Morale increased among the men. The shortages in military supplies were being addressed now that factories all across the country were tasked with providing munitions for the war. Pioneering creeping barrage tactics, and with a well-supplied army at his disposal, General Alexei Brusilov launched a devastating offensive against the unsuspecting Austro-Hungarian army in Galicia. The Austrians lost over a million men as Slavic units of the Austrian army flooded across Russian lines to change their allegiance. The Habsburg Empire was dealt a mortal blow from which it would never recover.

Despite its many successes, the Brusilov Offensive was an ultimate failure, since Russian forces in the northern sector of the Eastern Front failed to maintain pressure on the German lines. This allowed the German command scope to grant the Austrian Emperor's request for reinforcements to bolster his deteriorating position. The German troops managed to successfully hold off Brusilov's attacks before launching a counter-offensive to drive Brusilov back behind his initial lines. In the final reckoning the offensive cost the Russian army almost a million men to little effect. Nevertheless, the performance was a significant improvement on previous years and the Russian command had high hopes that the war would shift in their favor in 1917.

Whatever hopes the Tsar and his generals had for 1917 were not reflected in the capital. While the Tsar remained at headquarters, the situation in the home front deteriorated. The need to supply the army with food and equipment caused shortages in Russia, which in turn led to inflation as the prices of everyday goods skyrocketed. The efforts to increase production in the factories also had a negative effect. While factory owners made large profits, workers were forced to work for long hours in poor conditions for low wages. The situation was exploited by socialist politicians who denounced the government for fighting an imperialist war and called for peace with the Germans—after all, the rank-and-file of the German army were also fellow workers forced into uniform by their imperialist overlords.

In Petrograd, the tsarist government did not only face opposition from socialist revolutionaries, but came under fire from political factions all across the political spectrum. The State Duma reassembled to debate the government's mishandling of the war effort. Upon his departure from the

capital, the Tsar entrusted day-to-day government affairs to his wife, Tsarina Alexandra. The Tsarina had been a princess of the German Grand Duchy of Hesse, and many Russians of all backgrounds had suspicions that she had German sympathies. In a celebrated speech in 1916, the liberal politician Pavel Milyukov accused the government's persecution of the war as “either incompetence or treason.”

Although the allegations of treason against Alexandra were largely the result of propaganda, the Tsarina was fiercely protective of her imperial powers and resisted attempts from private industry to encroach on tsarist prerogatives. As a result, efforts by the Military Industrial Committee, set up in 1915 by business leaders to support the war effort, were regarded with suspicion. Keen to avoid ministers from consolidating too much power in their hands, Alexandra dismissed those who seemed intent on taking an active political role against the monarchy's wishes. As a result, there were four different prime ministers over the course of 1916, a situation which monarchist Duma deputy Vladimir Purishkevich described as “ministerial leapfrog.” Issuing orders one day and counter-orders the next, the government in Petrograd was in a state of complete disorder.

One individual who appeared to be constantly present at Alexandra's side was the peasant monk Grigory Rasputin. Rasputin had been a frequent visitor to the imperial court following the birth of Tsarevich Alexei, the heir to the throne, in 1904. After four daughters, Tsar Nicholas finally had his male heir, but the young tsarevich was a hemophiliac and constantly required supervision and medical attention. As doctors despaired over Alexei's condition, only Rasputin seemed to have the ability to stop the bleeding. Keen to ensure the survival of her son for personal and political reasons, Alexandra ensured that Rasputin was never far away.

The presence of Rasputin at court troubled ministers and family members alike. Unsurprisingly, noble court grandees found the Siberian peasant's speech and manners repulsive. The closeness between the Tsarina and the man whom she referred to in letters to her husband as 'our friend' sparked scandalous rumors across the capital and beyond. Satirical cartoons visualized the rumors that Rasputin was having sexual relations with the Tsarina and her ladies-in-waiting—the propagation of which Rasputin appeared to actively encourage. Already, in 1912, Speaker of the State Duma Mikhail Rodzianko warned the Tsar that “no revolutionary propaganda could achieve as much as Rasputin's mere presence at court,” presenting Nicholas

with a pile evidence of Rasputin's immoral behavior. On several occasions Rasputin was sent away, but he always found a way back. With the Tsar away from his capital, it seemed as though Rasputin was directing affairs of government alongside the Tsarina.

Over the years numerous plots had been conjured by state ministries to assassinate Rasputin, but they had all been abandoned through lack of will. Eventually Prince Felix Yusupov decided to take the matter into his own hands. Married to the Tsar's niece, Yusupov persuaded Grand Duke Dmitri Pavlovich to join the plot. Dmitri had a close relationship with the Tsar, his first cousin, but had been disillusioned by the way in which the war was being conducted. Vladimir Purishkevich, who had spoken out against Rasputin's influence in Duma sessions on several occasions, was also a willing member of the conspiracy.

It is impossible to know exactly what happened on the night of 16-17 December when the plot was carried out, since the eyewitness accounts by the perpetrators differ significantly from each other. While Yusupov became a celebrity in the western world for his role in Rasputin's death, in later years Grand Duke Dmitri seemed troubled by guilt. It appears that upon arriving at Yusupov's palace on the Moika river, Rasputin was first supplied with poisoned cakes and wine, which failed to have the desired effect. After some time, Yusupov shot at Rasputin, who fell motionless. When Yusupov approached Rasputin, the latter sprung up and wrestled him to the ground. With great difficulty Yusupov freed himself, whereupon Purishkevich fired several shots at Rasputin's head, which finally killed him.

The operation had taken much longer than anticipated, and the assassins were keen to dispose of the body as quickly as possible. It was already 5 am and the darkness was already fading. After driving a short distance, the body was thrown into the Malaya Nevka river. In their hurry, the conspirators had forgotten to attach weights to hold the body down. News of the assassination spread across Petrograd quickly when Rasputin's bloodied body was discovered floating in the river beneath the ice. Yusupov and his co-conspirators believed that by removing Rasputin the monarchy could be saved and public opinion would be satisfied. Subsequent events were to prove otherwise.

Chapter 2 – The Midnight Train

By the end of 1916, increasingly severe economic problems faced at the home front by the people of Petrograd translated into a series of mass strikes and street demonstrations. While strikes were commonplace throughout the war, the ones at the beginning of 1917 were unprecedented in their size, scale, and militancy. On 9 January, more than 140,000 workers went on strike to commemorate the events of Bloody Sunday twelve years prior, when peaceful demonstrations were suppressed by Cossack troops on Palace Square in front of the Winter Palace. These events had launched the Revolution of 1905, a year-long series of demonstrations and protests against the Tsarist state across the entire country, resulting in concessions from Nicholas II, which included the establishment of the State Duma. Nicholas nevertheless managed to survive, though the imperial family decided to move out of the Winter Palace and live in the Alexander Palace in Tsarskoe Selo.

Although some workers were persuaded to return to work by promises of higher wages, by mid-February more than 100,000 workers remained on the streets. On 18 February 1917, 20,000 workers from the Putilov Arms Factory in Petrograd—which had made crucial contributions to supplying the Russian army with much-needed munitions—went on strike because their managers had denied them a pay increase. This triggered similar demonstrations in other factories as workers found it increasingly difficult to afford basic foodstuffs as prices continued to increase.

On 19 February, in an effort to ameliorate the economic shortages not only in Petrograd but across the country, the government announced the introduction of food rationing, which would begin in March. The policy had the opposite effect as intended, as people in Petrograd rushed to buy goods while they were still available and unrationed. These disturbances were amplified on 23 February, as Petrograd's womenfolk marked International Women's Day with demands for equal rights. As many as 500,000 people were on the streets for a range of different causes, but it was evident that all hoped for a change in the status quo. The police successfully fought to contain the disturbances, but it was clear that the maintenance of order in the capital was hanging by a thread.

On 25 February, the Tsar issued an order for General Sergei Khabalov, the

commander of the Petrograd garrison, to suppress the demonstrations with rifle fire. On the following day, Khabalov reported to the Tsar that some units refused to carry out orders to fire at the crowds and instead joined them. The workers, recognizing that rank-and-file soldiers were of humble backgrounds, appealed to the soldiers and persuaded them that there was no point in fighting and dying for the Tsar's imperialist war aims. This was the first case of open mutiny in the Petrograd military garrison, which amounted to 170,000 men.

For much of Russian history, the army was a bastion of the monarchy that could be called upon to protect the state against revolution. However, as a result of the terrible losses suffered by the Russian army over the course of the war, the social composition of the Russian army had changed dramatically. It is estimated that by the beginning of 1917, 70 percent of the officer class—usually consisting of aristocrats—was of peasant origin. While the Russian peasantry had traditionally been supportive of the tsarist state, attitudes began to change at the end of the 19th century. Previous elections had shown that most peasants favored the agrarian socialist policies of the Socialist Revolutionary Party. This meant that many regiments that were ordered to suppress the revolutionaries decided to join the masses instead.

The breakdown of military discipline while Russia was engaged in a deadly war caused great anxiety among Russia's political and military elite. Russia's military elite, led by Chief-of-Staff General Mikhail Alexeev, believed that in order to restore military discipline and ensure the survival of the empire, the Tsar had to abdicate from the throne. Alexeev sent a telegram to Nicholas advising him to abdicate. Grand Duke Nikolai Nikolaevich, the Tsar's uncle who was a respected military commander, also sent a telegram to his nephew advising him to abdicate. Thus, the Tsar lost the support of the military elite as well as the rank-and-file. Nevertheless, encouraged by letters from his wife which suggested that there was nothing to worry about, the Tsar ignored all requests to abdicate and remained at headquarters, relying on the police, and if necessary, his loyal Guard regiments.

On 27 February, Nicholas received news that most of his Guards regiments had joined the masses on the streets of Petrograd. The Volynsky Life Guard Regiment was the first to mutiny, and this triggered the mutiny of the remaining guards garrisoned in the capital. A particularly bitter blow to the Tsar was the fact that the Preobrazhensky Regiment—the most prestigious military unit in the army, originally created by Peter the Great—had joined

the demonstrations against the Tsar. As a result of the mutiny, the revolutionaries were now armed. Over 40,000 rifles fell into the hands of the workers as they hunted down the police. The defection of most of his army deprived the Tsar of his final bastion of loyalty. The mutinies did not only serve to weaken the war effort but also posed a mortal threat to the survival of the Romanov dynasty. Nicholas finally realized the danger to his rule and decided he had to return to his capital to restore order. At five in the morning on 28 February, he left General Headquarters and headed to Petrograd on his royal train.

While returning to the capital, the imperial train was intercepted and could go no further, as the railroads leading to the capital were occupied by revolutionaries. The railroad workers were among the most enthusiastic supporters of the revolution. Their route blocked, the royal train was forced to divert to the ancient city of Pskov, arriving on the evening of 1 March. Meanwhile, units at the Alexander Palace were abandoning the Tsar and leaving for Petrograd to join the demonstrations. At the train station in Pskov, the Tsar was met by General Nikolai Ruzsky and monarchist Duma deputies Alexander Guchkov and Vasily Shulgin, who presented Nicholas with an abdication manifesto. Ruzsky spoke forcefully in the presence of the Tsar, blaming him for the military and political failures and warning him that if he were to refuse to sign, his life would be in danger. Reluctantly, Nicholas signed the abdication manifesto that had been prepared for him.

At 3:00 the following afternoon, after a sleepless night, Nicholas II requested a change to his abdication manifesto. Tsarevich Alexei was not yet thirteen and was unlikely to live beyond his teens due to his incurable illness. He would also be succeeding to the throne at a politically dangerous juncture. Nicholas was also fully aware that his son would be in no position to wield any effective political power and defend the interests of the imperial court. For these reasons, Nicholas decided to abdicate on behalf of his son for the sake of the young Tsarevich, but he passed the throne to his younger brother, Grand Duke Mikhail Alexandrovich. It was this version of the abdication manifesto that was subsequently made public.

Nicholas's decision to pass the throne to Grand Duke Mikhail was completely unexpected. The men who had persuaded the Tsar to abdicate anticipated that Tsarevich Alexei, as the lawful heir to the throne, would assume the offices of emperor and tsar and the monarchy would remain in place. The Tsar's decision to abdicate on behalf of his son was probably illegal. The Law of

Succession which governed the dynastic succession of the Romanovs since 1797 stipulated that the Tsar would be succeeded by his eldest son and did not allow the monarch to intervene in the choice of a successor, and had been the practice instituted by Peter the Great. If the Tsar wished to change the succession—as he had considered doing so before Alexei's birth—he would have to repeal the law and introduce a new one. The situation was further complicated by the fact that Nicholas had previously excluded Mikhail from the succession due to his morganatic marriage—and scandalous relationship—with Natalia Brasova. Nevertheless, the Tsar's wish was granted while he still exercised autocratic power.

News of the Tsar's decision to transfer the throne to his brother confounded the expectations of the remaining defenders of the monarchy in Petrograd. They reckoned a young Tsar Alexei would not be able to exercise effective political power until he reached adulthood, which was by no means guaranteed. During this period, political power would be exercised by representative bodies such as the Duma rather than the imperial court. Indeed, twelve Duma deputies had already formed a Provisional Committee that would take care of government business. This would give the government, which enjoyed public confidence, the opportunity to restore order in Petrograd and continue the war. Instead, the prospect of Tsar Mikhail at the helm meant that the court would continue to exercise its authority, even under a constitutional monarchy. Consequently, the Duma moved to prevent Mikhail from assuming the throne.

When Mikhail Alexandrovich first heard the news that he was to inherit the throne, he was excited by the prospect. In discussions with Pavel Milyukov and Alexander Kerensky, both senior Duma politicians, the Grand Duke was enthusiastic about being a constitutional monarch like a British king—enjoying all the pomp and circumstance of imperial office without the burden of discharging the functions of government. Kerensky persuaded the Grand Duke that since the situation in Petrograd was still unstable, by assuming the throne Mikhail would be placing himself in danger. Accordingly, on 3 March the Grand Duke released a statement in which he declared that he would only accept the throne if it was offered to him by the Constituent Assembly, a representative body which would be summoned later in the year to decide on future constitutional matters.

Despite the Grand Duke's suggestion that he might one day assume the throne, Petrograd seemed ready to reject the Romanovs completely. The

Romanov dynasty, which had celebrated its tercentennial with much pomp and circumstance in 1913, was no more. Imperial symbols such as the double-headed eagle and the Tsarist tricolor flag were torn down from buildings on Nevsky Prospekt, the main thoroughfare of the Russian capital. They were replaced by a sea of red flags, while everyone in the capital was obliged to wear red clothing in public lest they be attacked for being a counterrevolutionary. Even Grand Duke Kirill, Nicholas II's cousin, tied a red handkerchief to his rifle in an effort to maintain military discipline in the regiment he commanded. The national anthem *God Save the Tsar* was replaced—unofficially—with the 18th-century religious hymn *How Great is Our Lord in Zion*. In the streets, revolutionaries sang the *Internationale* and the *Workers' Marseillaise*, a Russian version of the French national anthem with more radical lyrics. On 9 March, Nicholas II—now merely 'Colonel Nicholas Romanov'—and his family were placed under house arrest at the Alexander Palace. In Petrograd, however, it was as if the Romanovs were already long gone.

Chapter 3 – Dual Power

Although the Tsar did not abdicate until the beginning of March, the series of demonstrations that toppled the Romanov regime came to be known as the February Revolution. Following the Tsar's abdication, a Provisional Government was formed by leading Duma politicians. The body met at the Tauride Palace in Petrograd's Liteiny Prospekt, where the Duma previously met. On 3 March, the Provisional Government published an official announcement in which it announced that it was taking over the duties of the Tsarist government. The Provisional Government was self-declared and was not elected. The ten-man body was designed to manage day-to-day affairs of governments while preparing for elections to the Constituent Assembly later in the year.

The initial composition of the Provisional Government heavily favored liberal political parties. The liberals favored parliamentary government based on British and American models. They actively encouraged capitalism and business activity and many liberals remained monarchists, albeit favoring a monarchy that enjoyed far less political power. The Prime Minister was Prince Georgy Lvov, an aristocrat whose lineage stretched even further than the Romanovs. Lvov had been chairman of the Union of Zemstvos during the war, a body created to coordinate the activities of the elected village councils across the country which provided material assistance to the war effort in the form of supplies and military hospitals. A physically imposing figure with a long beard, Lvov was not affiliated to a political party and was rarely in the public eye.

Most of Lvov's ministers were Kadets—officially known as the Constitutional Democratic Party. The Kadets were formed following a split in the Russian liberal movement in 1905 after Nicholas II issued the October Manifesto that established the Duma. Unlike the Octobrist Party, which was satisfied by the concessions offered by the Tsar, the Kadets envisaged the Duma as a platform by which it would call for more radical political reforms, including universal civil rights, the ending of censorship, the legalization of trade unions, and the right to free education. The Kadets were led by the historian Pavel Milyukov, who became Foreign Minister in the new government.

Another prominent member of the Provisional Government was Minister of War Alexander Guchkov, the leader of the Octobrist Party. The Octobrist Party—or the Union of 17 October—was established in 1905 to support Nicholas II after he promulgated the October Manifesto. The Octobrist Party was well represented in the Third Duma between 1906 and 1910 and Guchkov and his party supported the political program of Prime Minister Pyotr Stolypin. Appointed Chairman of the Central War Industry Committee in 1915, Guchkov played a significant contribution to the effort to ensure the army was well supplied with arms and ammunition. While the Octobrists were monarchists and supported Romanov rule after 1905, over the course of the war Guchkov came to the conclusion that Nicholas had to be removed. He was one of the Duma deputies who met the Tsar in Pskov and persuaded him to abdicate.

Although the Provisional Government was soon recognized as the legitimate government in Russia by its British and French allies, its political power was limited. It was forced to compete for political power with the Petrograd Soviet, which met in the opposite wing of the Tauride Palace. While the Provisional Government represented the liberals, the Petrograd Soviet of Workers', Soldiers' and Sailors' Deputies represented the interests of the city's working class who were responsible for the strikes and disturbances that signaled the loss of confidence in the Tsarist regime. The body also included representatives from the army and the navy who joined the revolution. In fact, most of the deputies were soldiers. The presence of the army rank-and-file in the Petrograd Soviet meant that Order No. 1, issued on 1 March, proclaimed that the army and navy would only carry out orders from the government with approval from the Soviet. This proved a significant limitation to the powers of the Provisional Government, which sought to keep Russia in the First World War.

The Petrograd Soviet was dominated by two parties, the Socialist Revolutionaries (SRs), and the Mensheviks. Led by Viktor Chernov, the SRs inherited the ideology of the Populist movement, which espoused a form of agrarian socialism based on the Russian peasant commune. This meant that the SRs were primarily Slavophiles who supported Russian traditions and turned away from foreign ideas such as Marxism. Although the party did attempt to appeal to workers by adopting some Marxist ideas, the party's base remained in the Russian countryside. Nevertheless, it managed to win the support of a significant proportion of the Petrograd proletariat. The radical

wing of the party, the Left SRs, carried out a series of high profile political assassinations at the beginning of the 20th century. The most significant victims were Interior Minister Vyacheslav von Plehve in 1904 and Grand Duke Sergei (Nicholas II's uncle) in 1905.

The leadership of the Petrograd Soviet was dominated by the Mensheviks, who were not officially a political party, but rather a fraction of the Russian Social Democratic Party (RSDP, or SDs), which was inspired by Marxist policies and aspired to the support of the Russian working class. The SDs split into two major factions in 1903, when senior leaders Vladimir Lenin and Julius Martov fell out over questions of party strategy and organization. Lenin argued that the Russian proletariat was ready to take power on behalf of the people, and the party should consist of professional revolutionaries acting as the “vanguard of the proletariat.” Martov was more moderate and believed the party should grow a large member base and wait until Russia was further industrialized before seeking to overthrow the establishment. Lenin forced a vote in the party's central committee which he won. He therefore called his faction the Bolsheviks or Majoritarians, while Martov's supporters were known as Mensheviks, or Minoritarians. Despite this distinction, until 1917 the Mensheviks enjoyed far higher levels of support among the Russian working class than the Bolsheviks. While the Mensheviks participated in parliamentary politics, the Bolsheviks refused to participate. Lenin's ideas were too radical and his influence was limited. Nikolai Chkeidze, the first Chairman of the Petrograd Soviet, was an influential Georgian Menshevik.

The Provisional Government and the Petrograd Soviet depended on each other's support to exercise political power, a state of affairs described as 'dual power.' It may be said that while the Provisional Government enjoyed authority without power, the Petrograd Soviet enjoyed power without authority. Although the two bodies represented different class interests, inspired by the euphoria of the February Revolution both bodies worked together for a six-week period later called the 'honeymoon of the revolution.' Furthermore, the SRs, and especially the Mensheviks, believed that Russia required a lengthy period of bourgeois capitalism before the conditions were ripe for socialism. During this period of frantic activity, the Provisional Government, supported and encouraged by the Petrograd Soviet, introduced a series of liberal reforms dismantling the autocratic state of the tsars. These included an end to censorship, guaranteed civil rights and freedoms, and the

release of political prisoners. In the army, ranks were abolished and epaulets removed from uniforms. Lenin, returning to Russia from exile in Switzerland, described Russia as “the freest country in the world.”

The cooperation between the two bodies was facilitated by Alexander Kerensky, who uniquely held positions of responsibility in both organizations. A member of the Trudovik Party, which was closely aligned with the Socialist-Revolutionaries, Kerensky was the only socialist minister in the Provisional Government, serving as Minister of Justice. At the same time, he was also Vice Chair of the Petrograd Soviet and was a well-respected socialist revolutionary. Owing to these commitments, Kerensky was often seen running from one end of the Tauride Palace to the other in order to mediate and transmit messages between the two organizations. When Kerensky appeared in meetings of the Provisional Government, he would wear a suit and tie like his fellow ministers. As he made his way to the Soviet, he would remove his tie and wear a worker's cap. It is likely that he had to perform this routine several times a day, especially when contentious issues were being debated. For this reason alone, Kerensky was most likely the hardest working politician in Petrograd during the immediate aftermath of the revolution.

The honeymoon of the revolution came to an abrupt end in mid-April when the War Aims Crisis broke out. While Russia remained a participant in the First World War alongside Britain and France, the nature of her participation was questioned, especially in the Petrograd Soviet. Some deputies believed that Russia should end the war as soon as possible regardless of territorial losses, since the international proletariat would invariably destroy the German and Austrian empires in due course. The majority of deputies were more realistic and adopted a policy of 'revolutionary defencism.' Under this policy, the Russian army would continue fighting to defend territory which had belonged to the Russian Empire but would not seek to occupy and annex territory at the expense of its enemies. Matters came to a head on 18 April when a telegram sent by Foreign Minister Pavel Milyukov to the Allies was leaked to the press. Milyukov stated that Russia would not only remain an active participant in the war but underlined that in the event of victory, the Allies would remain obliged to honor their guarantee of transferring Constantinople and the Turkish Straits to Russian control. This was part of an agreement the Allies had made with Tsar Nicholas II in 1915.

The War Aims Crisis threatened the integrity of the Provisional Government.

Milyukov's telegram sparked a demonstration on the streets of the capital, and the Petrograd Soviet made it clear that it did not support the Provisional Government's war aims. On 24 April, Milyukov realized his position was untenable and resigned from his post. The Ukrainian industrialist Mikhail Tereshchenko replaced him. Guchkov, who supported Milyukov on the issue, also left his post as War Minister. Alexander Kerensky, whose political profile continued to rise, was appointed to the office of War Minister. In response to the crisis, Lvov offered ministerial positions to five other moderate socialists representing the Mensheviks and the SRs. Viktor Chernov, the leader of the SRs, became Minister of Agriculture. Three new positions were created to reflect the political program of the socialist parties: Minister of Labor, Minister of Food, Minister of Post and Telegraph.

It might be expected that the increased presence of socialist ministers in the Provisional Government would have facilitated co-operation between the Provisional Government and the Petrograd Soviet. In fact, after April 1917 relations between the two organizations were increasingly marked by conflict and suspicion rather than co-operation. Invited into government, the socialist ministers came to appreciate the scale of Russia's military and economic difficulties but lacked the means and the will to take decisive action. The Provisional Government deferred action on important issues such as land redistribution, arguing that it was a matter for the Constituent Assembly. Lack of action on key issues resulted in a deterioration of the military and economic situation and contributed to the government losing support.

Furthermore, the economic problems that afflicted Russia impacted the whole country rather than Petrograd itself. Neither the Provisional Government nor the Petrograd Soviet was able to exercise power beyond Petrograd and its outskirts. British historian Orlando Figes argues that central authority had broken down in February. Although the Petrograd Soviet sought to co-ordinate the actions of city and regional soviets throughout the country, their efforts met with mixed success since the political composition of local soviets varied significantly. Thus, political power was concentrated at the level of city and region rather than in the capital. The Provisional Government would also face difficulties from Lenin's Bolsheviks, which gained popularity over the course of the year due to its uncompromising stance.

Chapter 4 – Return from exile

The February Revolution and the Tsar's abdication had taken Lenin by surprise. In late 1916, in an address to international socialists in Switzerland, he said that he did not expect to see a revolution in Russia during his lifetime. In exile, Lenin found it difficult to receive accurate information about the situation in Russia. It is likely that he received news about Russia from the international press, which suggested that Russia's military fortunes were improving. Even when he received news of the Tsar's abdication, he was skeptical. False rumors were easily spread during the war for propaganda purposes. When Lenin became convinced that the news was genuine, he made plans for an immediate return to Russia. He had waited for twenty years for the outbreak of revolution in Russia, and when it came to pass he was absent. He was determined to return and put his plans into action.

Vladimir Ilyich Ulyanov was not a born revolutionary. His father Ilya was a school inspector in Simbirsk province, a position of responsibility which made him a hereditary noble. The young Vladimir seemed destined for a career in the imperial bureaucracy. This idyllic childhood was shattered in 1886 when his older brother, Alexander Ulyanov, a student at Saint Petersburg University, was hanged after participating in a plot to kill Tsar Alexander III. This traumatic event encouraged Vladimir to take a greater interest in revolutionary politics. He was expelled from Kazan University for participating in revolutionary activities, although he was eventually allowed to take his exams in Saint Petersburg. This did not deter him from further political activity, and he was soon introduced to the works of Karl Marx.

In the 1890s, Vladimir Ulyanov began to read the works of Russian Marxist Georgy Plekhanov. He agreed with Plekhanov's idea that Russia was transitioning from feudalism to capitalism, consequently the Russian working class would act as the agent for socialist revolution. This was the founding principle of the Russian Marxist Party in 1898, which was renamed the Russian Social Democratic Labour Party in 1900. Ulyanov founded the radical newspaper *Iskra* which served as the party's official newspaper. In 1901, he began to adopt the pseudonym N. Lenin, though the reason behind his choice is unclear. In 1902 he published *What is to be Done?*, his first major theoretical work. The treatise, which shared a title with Nikolay

Chernyshevsky's revolutionary novel from 1863, confronted elements among the Social Democrats who were in favor of co-operating with bourgeois elements as an intermediary step to full socialism.

Lenin's publication sparked an intense theoretical debate within the Russian Social Democratic Party. Using the examples of Britain and Germany, Marx had argued that historical laws dictated that society should move from feudalism to bourgeois capitalism, and only then onto socialism and finally communism. The transition from capitalism to socialism could only begin once the capitalist stage managed to accumulate enough wealth. Russian society only began to shift from feudalism to capitalism at the end of the nineteenth century. Lenin's opponents therefore argued, according to Marx's theory, that Russian capitalism should be allowed to develop for a couple of generations before the time was ripe for a challenge to the new order. Workers could challenge factory owners by demanding higher wages and better working conditions but should not seek to overthrow the capitalist order. Lenin put forward an alternate theory in which he argued that bourgeois capitalism was at its weakest precisely when it was in its early stages. If workers were to form trade unions and demand better working conditions, in an effort to avoid revolution the capitalists may be encouraged to conciliate with union leaders and develop friendlier relations, albeit ones that continued to exploit the workers. This had been happening in Germany and the United Kingdom, where conservative governments were introducing welfare reforms and sanctioning the establishment of trade unions. Lenin believed that the longer this happened, the more difficult it would be to encourage the working classes to overthrow the bourgeois order.

As described in the previous chapter, the RSDLP split into two major factions in 1903. As leader of the Bolsheviks, Lenin sought to create a professional revolutionary organization dedicated to overthrowing the Tsarist autocracy, applying the principles he had set out in *What is to be Done?* In order to maintain party discipline, Lenin rejected pluralism within the party, maintaining a tight grip on the decision-making process within the party. The Bolsheviks rejected parliamentary democracy and refused to participate in the elections to the Imperial Duma in April 1906. Although the Bolsheviks did participate in the elections to the Second Duma in July, their performance was modest in comparison to the Socialist Revolutionaries and the Mensheviks. Lenin's uncompromising politics made himself and leading Bolsheviks targets for the Tsarist secret police. As a result, Lenin and his

fellow Bolsheviks spent much of the early twentieth century avoiding the Russian authorities and conducting his revolutionary activities in exile in a number of cities in western and central Europe, including London, Geneva, Paris, and Krakow.

Despite Lenin's conception that the Bolsheviks would serve as the vanguard of the revolution, his party played a minimal role in the events in February that led to Nicholas II's abdication. This was not altogether surprising, since most of the Bolshevik leaders were in internal or external exile. The amnesty for political prisoners ensured that exiled Bolsheviks could freely return to Russia. While Bolsheviks like Stalin who were exiled in Siberia found it relatively straightforward to return to Petrograd, Lenin found himself in a difficult position by being in Switzerland. In order to return to Russia by the most direct route, he would have to travel across Germany, which was still enemy territory for a man who remained a Russian citizen, no matter how many times he had fallen foul of the authorities under Tsarist rule. Fortunately, the German authorities decided to let him do just that.

The German Empire, born out of Prussian conservatism, was no friend of revolutionaries like Lenin. Nevertheless, the German government realized that Lenin could further destabilize the Russian war effort, allowing German armies to make further conquests, or alternatively force an advantageous peace treaty for Germany. The German authorities allowed Lenin to travel across the empire in a sealed train. In fact, Lenin and his fellow revolutionaries were given a single carriage, and other passengers could freely board the train's other carriages. Lenin insisted the carriage be granted “extra-territorial status” to “seal” it from contact with Germans. This included a chalk line dividing the Russian exiles’ territory from the German territory of the military guards on board.

Lenin and his fellow exiles, all of them revolutionaries including his wife, Nadezhda Krupskaya, had boarded the train in Zurich, crossed Germany, traveled the Baltic Sea by ferry and ridden 17 hours by rail from Stockholm 700 miles north to Haparanda. They hired horse-drawn sleds to head across the frozen river to Finland. “I remember that it was night,” Grigory Zinoviev, one of the exiles traveling with Lenin, would write in a memoir. “There was a long thin ribbon of sledges. On each sledge were two people. Tension as [we] approached the Finnish border reached its maximum....Vladimir Ilyich was outwardly calm.” Eight days later, he would reach Petrograd. Lenin did not fail to make use of the time he spent on the train back to Russia. He worked

frantically on a political program for the Bolsheviks to adopt.

Lenin condemned the Provisional Government as bourgeois and urged unconditional opposition to it, as "the utter falsity of all its promises should be made clear." He condemned World War I as a "predatory imperialist war" and the "revolutionary defencism" of foreign social democrat parties. He supported a policy of revolutionary defeatism, arguing that Russia should end the war as quickly as possible. He asserted that the power must be placed in the hand of the proletariat and the poorest section of peasants. The slogan ‘Peace, Land, and Bread’ was an indication of Lenin’s political priorities. He understood that most people wanted an end to a war from which they had nothing to gain. He was also aware of the crippling food shortages in the capital and the necessity to ensure that Petrograd workers could afford food. Lenin was also keen to redistribute aristocratic land among peasants in the Russian country side. Above all, Lenin hoped to overthrow the Provisional Government and bring the means of economic production under the control of the Soviets of Workers' Deputies. To encapsulate this idea, he promoted the slogan ‘All Power to the Soviets.’

On 3 April, Lenin arrived at Petrograd's Finland station where he was enthusiastically welcomed by cheering crowds. No sooner had he arrived in Russia, Lenin began to mobilize support for his policies. On 4 April, Lenin published the April Theses—the program which he developed on the train—and sought to convince fellow party members to adopt his line. The April Theses came as a surprise to most of the Bolshevik leadership. Senior leaders, including Lev Kamenev and Grigory Zinoviev, felt that Lenin had gone mad and the years he spent in foreign exile made him lose all sense of perspective in terms of the material situation in Russia. While most Bolsheviks were not keen on the Provisional Government, they aimed for greater representation in the Petrograd Soviet intending eventually to form a coalition government with the SRs and Mensheviks.

Lenin was soon to find a useful ally in his effort to convince his fellow Bolsheviks. Like Lenin, Leon Trotsky was in exile when the February Revolution broke out. Living in New York, Trotsky had a longer and no less arduous journey to make in order to return to Russia. He left New York on 14 March 1917, aboard the SS Kristianiafjord. The neutral Norwegian vessel was intercepted by British naval officials in Canada at Halifax, Nova Scotia, and Trotsky was detained for a month at Amherst Internment Camp in Nova Scotia. During this period, he established warm relationships with his fellow

inmates and won respect among them for his political perspectives. Meanwhile the Provisional Government's Foreign Minister Pavel Milyukov, pressured by the Petrograd Soviet, reluctantly demanded from Russia's British allies that Trotsky be released as a Russian citizen, which was successful on 16 April 1917. He reached Russia on 4 May, and after his return, Trotsky substantially agreed with the Bolshevik position, but did not join them right away.

A collaborator of Lenin's during the early days of the RSDLP, Trotsky did not identify with either of the main factions of the party, though more often than not he sided with the Mensheviks. Once the February Revolution had broken out, Trotsky was on the same page as Lenin. He took care not to break completely with the Mensheviks, but over the course of 1917 he moved ever closer to Lenin's position. After his arrival in Russia, Trotsky was a very useful ally for Lenin as the latter tirelessly campaigned to have the April Theses adopted as party policy. Trotsky was a talented and passionate public speaker, and his rhetorical skills certainly surpassed those of Lenin. He was also an experienced revolutionary, having served as briefly as President of the Petrograd Soviet during its first incarnation in 1905. Trotsky soon established himself as a senior member of the Bolshevik party leadership, second only to Lenin himself.

The uncompromising position held by Lenin, Trotsky, and eventually the Bolsheviks as a whole, soon paid dividends. The Provisional Government continued to lose support due to its inability to address the key economic issues that afflicted Petrograd. The presence of Menshevik and SR ministers in the Provisional Government contributed to a corresponding decline in popularity for their respective parties. As the largest party to demonstrate open opposition to the government, the Bolsheviks became increasingly popular. When the February Revolution broke out there were only 2,000 members of the Bolshevik Party in Petrograd. By April this number increased to 16,000. By the beginning of July, the party could count on the support of 200,000 members in the capital.

Chapter 5 – The July Days

Since the February Revolution, the Russian army in the front line was largely reduced to fighting defensive actions. In mid-June, War Minister Alexander Kerensky gave orders for an offensive by General Brusilov's army in Galicia, largely following the path laid out by the Brusilov Offensive the previous year. Kerensky hoped that a successful offensive would enable the Provisional Government to gain credibility both in the eyes of the Allies and within Russia itself. Kerensky hoped to show the world that the 'most democratic army in the world' could defeat the Austrians and Germans. This belief was not completely unjustified. Kerensky hoped to emulate the example of the French Revolutionary armies who were able to defeat *ancien regime* armies, motivated by the élan associated with new-found identity and citizenship. Kerensky hoped that the soldiers would be inspired to defend the gains of the revolution. In this he was supported by All-Russian Soviet of Workers' and Soldiers' Deputies, the umbrella body for soviets across the country.

Kerensky's expectations did not come to pass. While the Russian army initially managed to surprise the Austrians, it soon ran out of steam. By the time the German-Austrian army was able to launch a counter-attack, the Russian forces lost cohesion and broke ranks. The lack of military hierarchy and discipline prevented the Russian army from retreating in an orderly fashion. Unlike the French Revolutionary Wars, the Russian army had already been fighting the First World War for three exhausting years. The French Revolutionary armies carried battlefields on the point of their bayonets. The developments in projectile technology over the course of a century made bayonet charges less effective in the First World War. Consequently, this most democratic of all armies was cut down by enemy fire, and those that survived fled the ranks. Bereft of morale and discipline, the Russian army sustained casualties amounting to 60,000 men. This was twice the number of the casualties suffered by the Austro-German army.

As news of the failure of the Kerensky Offensive filtered through to Petrograd and the Provisional Government called up reinforcements from the Petrograd garrison, the Petrograd Soviet refused to sanction Kerensky's orders and the soldiers refused to go to the front. On 3 July, a crowd of 70,000 people, including mutinous soldiers, flocked to the streets of Petrograd staging demonstrations. The demonstrations received active

support from disillusioned soldiers on the front line. In a letter addressed to the Petrograd Soviet, a junior NCO named Yurchenko expresses his regret that the war has to continue with the shedding of innocent blood: “Is the German really trying to infringe on our freedom? No, on the contrary, this is just something made up by the bourgeois ministers, who tell us that we have to strengthen freedom, but at the same time they're killing people in this offensive of theirs and what can come of that?”

The scenes were reminiscent of those which caused the downfall of the Romanovs, and the Provisional Government appeared to be hanging by a thread. The Bolsheviks, who had been eagerly anticipating the overthrow of the Provisional Government, seemed destined to take power at any moment. For much of his life, and indeed for much of 1917, Lenin sought to convince everyone around him that the Bolsheviks had to take power immediately. Once again, however, events in the streets of Petrograd had taken Lenin by surprise, since he was on vacation in Finland when the demonstrations started. Upon his return on 4 July, 20,000 armed sailors from Kronstadt gathered outside Bolshevik Party Headquarters, established in the premises of the mansion of ballerina Matilda Kshesinskaya, Nicholas II's former mistress. They clamored for Lenin to make an appearance, expecting him to welcome them enthusiastically and give them instructions to arrest both the Provisional Government and the Petrograd Soviet. Instead, Lenin did not appear for a long time, and once he did he delivered brief and vague remarks in which he applauded their enthusiasm but refused to sanction the demonstrations and failed to give clear orders. On the following day, an official notice was published in the Bolshevik newspaper *Pravda* which called for the masses to disperse.

Why did Lenin refuse to support the masses during the July Days when it appeared that the Bolshevik Party itself had stirred them up in the first place? Some historians argue that the Bolshevik leadership encouraged the demonstrations in an effort to establish their level of support without the intention of taking power. Others argue that the July Days came as a surprise to Lenin. He considered the protestors to be an unruly mob, one which could easily turn against him. At any rate, this was a far cry from the party of disciplined professional revolutionaries whom he sought to create. There were good reasons for Lenin to avoid taking action in July. Although the party was becoming more popular by the day, the Bolsheviks did not have sufficient support among the Petrograd proletariat, not to speak of the rest of

the country. Even if the Bolsheviks were to gain control in the capital, they may still face resistance from the rest of the country. Furthermore, it would be incongruous for the Bolsheviks to seize power in the name of the soviets against the wishes of the Petrograd Soviet.

After Lenin’s refusal to lead them, the masses decided to take their complaints to the Petrograd Soviet. A crowd of 50,000 gathered outside the Tauride Palace, criticizing the SR and Menshevik ministers who had joined the Provisional Government. The protesters demanded to speak to the Soviet leadership and hear their explanations for refusing to take power. The SR leader and Minister of Agriculture Viktor Chernov appeared and attempted to calm the masses by justifying the Petrograd Soviet's position to the crowd of soldiers, workers, and sailors. Instead of placating the crowd, the demonstrators steadily grew more hostile, and Chernov was seized by a group of particularly zealous protestors. He was only released following the timely intervention of Trotsky, who fought his way through the crowd and requested they let go of the SR leader who had been bundled into a car. Had the Bolsheviks actively sought to overthrow the regime, there would have been no better opportunity to exploit the confusion and storm the Tauride Palace.

Although half a million people may have been involved in the July demonstrations, they soon dispersed once they recognized that they would not receive any support from either the Petrograd Soviet or the Bolshevik leadership. This gave the Provisional Government the opportunity it needed to reassert control. By 7 July, the expression of anger from the Petrograd masses had dissipated, with minimal casualties. But the July Days did lay bare the existential threat posed by the workers and soldiers both to the Russian bourgeoisie and to the government itself. Even if the leadership did not throw its weight behind the demonstrations, Bolshevik activists were actively involved in encouraging the soldiers of the Petrograd garrison to mutiny. The Provisional Government therefore launched a counter-revolutionary campaign which forced the Bolshevik Party into clandestine activity once again as the responsibility for the uprising was laid squarely at the feet of Lenin and the Bolsheviks, both by the Provisional Government and moderate elements in the Soviet.

As part of the effort to prevent the July Days from happening again, the Provisional Government, with support from the Petrograd Soviet, moved to suppress the Bolshevik leadership. The government ordered the arrest of

Lenin and other prominent Bolsheviks, raiding their offices, shutting down *Pravda*, and publicly alleging that Lenin was a German *agent provocateur* who had received money and instructions from the German government to overthrow the Provisional Government and take Russia out of the war. The fact that Lenin received financial assistance from the German government while returning to Russia seemed to reflect this, though this did not necessarily mean that he was receiving instructions from Berlin. Lenin first evaded arrest by hiding in many safe houses in Petrograd. Eventually, fearing an attempt on his life, he fled to the small settlement of Razliv in disguise with fellow Bolshevik Grigory Zinoviev. There, Lenin began work on the book that would become *The State and Revolution*, an exposition on how he believed the socialist state would develop after the proletariat revolution and how from then on the state would gradually wither away, leaving a pure communist society as Marx had envisaged. The book describes the role of the State in society, the necessity of proletarian revolution, and the theoretic inadequacies of social democracy—espoused by the Mensheviks—in achieving revolution to establish the dictatorship of the proletariat. At first, he urged for a Bolshevik-led insurrection to topple the government, but the idea was rejected. Hence, Lenin headed to Finland and arrived at Helsinki on 10 August, where he hid away in safe houses belonging to Bolshevik sympathizers. Other Bolshevik leaders were not as fortunate. Trotsky, Kamenev, and Lunacharsky were arrested and all remained in prison until Kerensky released them in late August.

Much of the repressive actions taken against the Bolshevik leaders were not carried out by the liberal prime minister Georgy Lvov but the socialist Alexander Kerensky. The July Days had plunged the Provisional Government into crisis. Several liberal ministers resigned from the government following a decision by the government to recognize the establishment of an independent Ukrainian government. The Mensheviks and SRs, who could have taken power through the Petrograd Soviet, decided instead to seek to form a new coalition with liberals in the Provisional Government. On 6 July, Alexander Kerensky returned to Petrograd after efforts to rally the demoralized troops at the front, ensuring that the offensive was not a complete disaster. He was welcomed back as a national hero and regarded as the only person who could reunite the country. On 8 July, Lvov resigned as Prime Minister, much to his own relief. Lvov recognized that he lacked the will to eliminate the Petrograd Soviet, which he saw as the only

way to save the country. Kerensky's appointment to the highest office marked the zenith of the cult of Kerensky, who was regarded by the cultural intelligentsia, including theater directors Stanislavsky and Nemirovich-Danchenko, as the embodiment of the Russian national ideal. It is said that Kerensky was drunk on the enthusiastic support he enjoyed, and began to regard himself as a Russian Napoleon Bonaparte, the man who would end the excesses of the revolution while preserving its gains. Critics claimed that he changed his signature so that 'Alexander K.' now resembled 'Alexander IV.'

Kerensky wished to establish the central government as a strong authority, reversing some of the liberal measures introduced in the euphoric days and weeks following the February Revolution. In response to the demonstrations of the July Days, he began enacting measures to impose discipline in Petrograd to prevent the resumption of civil disorder. Street processions in Petrograd were banned and any publication that provoked disorder was forbidden as a part of an effort to maintain civil order in the city. The government also held a public funeral for Cossack soldiers who were killed by July Day participants on 15 July. On 18 July, Kerensky moved the new government ministers into the Winter Palace and ordered the Soviet to move from the Tauride Palace to the Smolny Institute down the road. This decision was of great symbolic importance. By returning the seat of government to the Winter Palace in the heart of Petrograd, Kerensky hoped to establish a form of continuity with the Tsarist regime which had ruled Russia for many centuries. The Smolny Institute, on the other hand, had served as a finishing school for aristocratic daughters and was located far from the city center. The two parties which together held dual power now operated from separate premises. Over the course of 1917, the Provisional Government and the Petrograd Soviet drifted away from each other politically. In July, they were moved apart physically.

Chapter 6 – The abortive coup

The July Days and the ministerial crisis left the Provisional Government standing on a precipice. Kerensky moved further away from his former colleagues in the Petrograd Soviet in an effort to conciliate liberals and conservatives who favored the re-imposition of political order. A week after taking office, Kerensky dismissed Brusilov and appointed the hardline General Lavr Kornilov as commander-in-chief, giving him a mandate to restore military discipline in the army. This would not only serve to improve Russia's fortunes in the war but also ensure that soldiers could be relied on to maintain order in the capital. Kornilov's appointment was supported by Russia's industrial and business elite, who feared the consequences of a socialist government under the Bolsheviks. Despite having been a socialist firebrand himself, Kerensky recognized the necessity of imposing order and discipline in Petrograd to ensure that his government could carry out its day-to-day duties effectively.

A military officer with Siberian Cossack origins, Kornilov was a rare exception among Russia’s military elite, most of whom could boast of distinguished aristocratic lineages. He spent much of his military career serving in Central and Eastern Asia. During the First World War, he was taken into Austrian captivity in 1915 but managed to escape the following year, returning to Russia on foot. By the time of the February Revolution, he was placed in command of the Petrograd Military District and gave orders to keep Nicholas II and his family under house arrest. This suggests that he was sympathetic to the revolution, at least to the liberal bourgeois Provisional Government. During the summer offensive of 1917, Kornilov's men achieved the most success, his cavalry units overcoming Austrian defenses while most Russian infantry units had already been stopped in their tracks. Kornilov was therefore one of few officers to emerge from the June offensive with an enhanced reputation. Kerensky had already appointed him to command the Southwestern Front. These factors made him an obvious choice as Brusilov's replacement for the supreme command.

In order to fulfil his mandate, Kornilov proposed a series of reforms to maintain order and discipline in both military and civilian life. These ranged from the abolition of the soldiers’ committees established in accordance with

the Petrograd Soviet's Order No. 1 to the restoration of the death penalty for civilians and the imposition of martial law throughout the country. In effect, Kornilov was seeking to establish a military dictatorship. Kornilov argued that this was a necessary step to ensure order and tranquility in the streets of Petrograd, protecting the Provisional Government from any attempts to overthrow it. This placed the Prime Minister in a dilemma and Kerensky was unenthusiastic about Kornilov's plans. Kerensky appreciated Kornilov's intention to restore military control but felt uneasy about the prospect of Kornilov effectively acting as military dictator and challenging his own authority as head of the civil government. Even if he had no immediate intentions to do so, Kornilov could easily be in a position to remove Kerensky from the office of Prime Minister. For these reasons, the Prime Minister was reluctant to approve his commander-in-chief's radical reform program.

On 25 August, Kornilov gave orders for a corps under the command of General Alexander Krymov to enter Petrograd with instructions to suppress the Petrograd Soviet. It is unclear why Kornilov gave this order. It is possible that Kornilov heard rumors of a Bolshevik coup planned for the end of August and ordered Krymov to strengthen the defense of the capital. More likely, Kornilov anticipated that his military reforms would be announced by the government, which would inevitably result in the outbreak of protests. Under this pretext, Krymov could use his men to suppress the Petrograd Soviet. This was a trigger for a political crisis subsequently known as the Kornilov Affair. While Kornilov had issued his orders in an effort to save the Provisional Government, Kerensky began to fear that he was intent on overthrowing it. Relations between the two men were increasingly strained. Kerensky believed that Kornilov had Napoleonic ambitions and was seeking to replace him, while Kornilov considered Kerensky a weak leader who was under the control of the Petrograd Soviet and whose indecisive leadership would inevitably deliver a Bolshevik revolution. The two men clashed publicly at a State Conference in Moscow held on 12-14 August, summoned by Kerensky in an effort to rally the country behind him. Kerensky spoke of the need to restore order with 'blood and iron.' The Prime Minister was followed by his supreme commander, who directly provoked the former by announcing that he had presented Kerensky with a set of reforms which would enable the government to restore order as Kerensky had said. Having finished his speech, the commander-in-chief left for the train station and sped

off to headquarters, while his crowd continued to give him a standing ovation.

Kerensky had spent much of 1917 maneuvering between right and left. This balancing act had so far been successful and propelled him to the national leadership. Over the course of the year, however, the political center that Kerensky occupied diminished in size every day, and Kerensky was forced to make difficult choices. Through his order to suppress the Petrograd Soviet, Kornilov had thrown down a gauntlet and forced Kerensky to take sides between the Soviet on the one hand and the liberals and conservatives on the other. Vladimir Lvov, an Octobrist politician who was a former minister in the Provisional Government, approached Kerensky and warned him of an assassination plot by Kornilov's officers. He also offered to act as an envoy between Kerensky and Kornilov in an effort to reach an understanding between the two men concerning the future of the government. When Lvov arrived at headquarters, Kornilov told him that Russia could not survive without a military dictatorship. He went on to say that he was prepared to serve under Kerensky but would prefer to take power as military dictator himself. When Lvov returned to Petrograd, he told the Prime Minister that Kornilov had aspirations to become military dictator, neglecting to mention that he was also willing to serve under Kerensky. Lvov also made the revelation that he had overheard one of Kornilov's officers speaking about assassinating Kerensky.

Lvov's report convinced Kerensky that Kornilov was up to no good. The two men exchanged telegrams but Kerensky received no clarification about Kornilov's plans. On the morning of 27 August, Kerensky sent Kornilov a telegram informing him of his dismissal from the supreme command with instructions to report to Petrograd alone. At a meeting with his ministers he informed them of Kornilov's dismissal and demanded dictatorial powers. Almost all the ministers agreed except the Kadets, who threatened to resign. Kerensky was urged not to publicize Kornilov's dismissal until a suitable solution was found. These efforts to negotiate were in vain once it became clear the Kerensky had issued a telegram to the army stating that Kornilov was a traitor. Meanwhile, Krymov's troops continued marching on Petrograd, throwing Kerensky and his government into a panic. Kornilov must have rated his chances highly, being fully aware that he had the majority of the army on his side.

Naturally, Kerensky felt threatened by the imminent prospect of men in

uniform rushing into his capital under instructions from a general whom he had recently denounced as a traitor. The urgent assistance he desperately needed came from the Petrograd Soviet. Although the Soviet had been targeted by Kerensky, its leaders knew that the consequences would be much worse if they stood by idly as Kornilov's men entered Petrograd. Keen to make use of all the assistance he could find, Kerensky released senior Bolsheviks, including Trotsky and Lev Kamenev who were imprisoned following the July Days. The Bolsheviks, Mensheviks, and SRs persuaded a coordinated strategy which aimed to mobilize rail workers to sabotage the railway tracks in order to impede the progress of the trains carrying Kornilov's troops to the capital. Other socialist activists infiltrated into Kornilov's army in an effort to persuade them to desert. The Petrograd Soviet established a Military Revolutionary Committee, which distributed weapons to arm the workers against Kornilov's 'counter-revolutionary activities.' The weapons were not needed. Krymov's men found progress difficult in the midst of all the impediments the workers had placed in their path, and increasing numbers of men deserted, disdaining the prospect of taking up arms against their fellow citizens. Having been abandoned by his army, Krymov committed suicide on 31 August. Days later, Kornilov was arrested at headquarters, officially stripped of his position as commander-in-chief and imprisoned in the nearby Bykhov Monastery along with a number of other officers who participated in the coup.

The Kornilov Affair, as the attempted coup was subsequently known, further damaged the credibility of the Kerensky government. The Prime Minister dismissed much of his inner circle and established a new government called the Directorate, a conscious or unconscious echo of the Directory, the government formed by moderates during the French Revolution in 1794 following the excesses of Jacobin rule under Maximilien Robespierre. In the process, Kerensky also dissolved the State Duma and officially declared Russia a republic, eliminating any prospects of Grand Duke Mikhail eventually assuming his brother's throne. Kerensky was afraid that the continued possibility of Russia remaining a monarchy might encourage efforts by conservatives to restore the Romanovs to the throne by force. Unlike its French namesake, this Russian Directorate lasted a mere three months as Kerensky found himself increasingly bereft of allies.

The events of July and August 1917 significantly undermined Kerensky's balancing act. His decision to crack down on the Bolsheviks following the

July Days damaged his credibility with the left, who believed he was in league with Kornilov to suppress the Petrograd Soviet up to the very last minute. By choosing to confront Kornilov at the crucial moment, Kerensky also lost the support of liberals and conservatives on the right, who believed that Kornilov was simply acting on orders from Kerensky himself. Kerensky hoped to solve the Provisional Government's perennial problem of being a temporary institution by granting himself more authority, but by this point it was already too late. Kerensky may have assumed greater powers, at least in name, but he was no longer in a position to use it effectively. The Kornilov Affair had a significant effect on his mental state, and he appears to have been suffering from bipolar disorder. Rumors spread around the city that the sleepless Prime Minister was wandering around the former imperial apartments in the early hours of the morning taking drugs and singing opera arias. This may have been a fabrication, but judging from his public appearance everyone could see that Kerensky was a broken man.

The net effect of the Kornilov Affair was a significant increase in support for the Bolshevik Party. The Bolsheviks made a significant contribution to the defense of Petrograd, and the Petrograd Soviet demanded Kerensky release several hundred Bolshevik activists who had been detained since the July Days. Bolshevik representation in the soviets increased during the immediate aftermath of the Kornilov Affair. Since workers and soldiers could recall their representatives at any time, the Bolsheviks took advantage of growing opposition to the Soviet's moderate policies and managed to elect Bolshevik deputies to the Petrograd Soviet. On 1 September, the Bolsheviks, who had obtained a majority in the Petrograd Soviet, forced a vote on the question of whether the soviets should assume power. It passed 700 to 13, with 36 abstentions. The Soviet's leadership under Tsereteli, however, refused to pursue this course, arguing that the vote was called at short notice. Nevertheless, he privately recognized that the tide was turning in Lenin's favor. The conditions for a Bolshevik takeover were met.

Chapter 7 – Ten Days that Shook the World

The Kornilov Affair and its consequences significantly altered the balance of political power in Petrograd. The Provisional Government and Kerensky were on its last legs, while the Petrograd Soviet, increasingly dominated by Bolsheviks, became increasingly assertive. In order to resolve the dispute that had arisen after the Soviet voted to take power against the wishes of its leadership, the All-Russian Central Executive Committee established a Democratic Conference with representation from across the country to discuss the matter. After much deliberation, the body proposed establishing a legislative body called the Provisional Council, with representatives from both the workers and the bourgeoisie. It also called for the All-Russian Congress of Soviets to convene at the end of October. On 21 September, the Bolshevik Party's Central Committee held a meeting among delegates to the Democratic Conference on the question of the party's participation in the Provisional Council. In an intense debate, hardliners led by Trotsky threatened to walk out of the Conference, while moderates such as Kamenev favored participation. The debates were an echo of those in April on the theoretical question of whether the Bolshevik Party should seize power immediately or to support the development of the bourgeois state.

When the issue was put to the floor for a vote, the moderates scored a victory with 77 votes to 50. Accordingly, the Bolsheviks agreed to participate in the Provisional Council, albeit with the intention of using their votes to prevent a coalition with the bourgeoisie. Nevertheless, Trotsky's hardline stance was supported by Lenin, who at this time was still in hiding in Finland. He writes in support of Trotsky, stating "we cannot and must not under any circumstances reconcile ourselves to participation. A group at one of the conferences is not the highest organ of the party and even the decisions of the highest organs are subject to revision on the basis of experience. We must strive at all cost to have the boycott question solved at a plenary meeting of the Central Committee and at an extraordinary party congress." By adopting this position, Lenin hoped to bypass the executive organs of his party and mobilize the party rank-and-file to support a boycott of the Council. "We must go out to the Soviets of workers, soldiers and peasants' deputies, go out into the trade unions, go out in general to the masses." The situation in

Petrograd was the same as throughout the country, in Moscow, in Kiev. The party leadership favored participation, but the membership was overwhelmingly in favor of the boycott. The Bolshevik leadership in the absence of Lenin nevertheless continued their policy of engagement with the Council.

In any event, the Provisional Council lacked the political powers the moderate socialists envisaged it would have, and Kerensky refused to be held to account to the body. On 24 September, he established another coalition government with Kadets and socialists, although the political talent of these new ministers was significantly limited. Kerensky hoped that this government would at least keep him going until November, when the elections to the Constituent Assembly were to be held. Kerensky's refusal to be accountable to the Provisional Council was a sign that the moderate socialist parties had also run out of ideas. Both the Mensheviks and the SRs experienced a drastic decline in popular support at the expensive of their Bolshevik rivals. On 25 September, the Bolsheviks were confident enough to challenge for the leadership of the Petrograd Soviet. They called for the executive to be replaced, observing that Kerensky remained a member of the Soviet's executive, even though the majority of the deputies now regarded him as a counter-revolutionary. The body duly elected Leon Trotsky as Chairman of the Petrograd Soviet in place of the Menshevik incumbent, Nikolai Chkeidze.

Despite this resolution, Lenin, still hiding in the Finnish city of Vyborg, continued to urge the Bolshevik leadership to take power immediately and form a Bolshevik government, before the Congress was convened to sanction the action. He saw no future in forming a coalition government with the SRs and Mensheviks, even if this was done through the soviets. While Trotsky agreed with Lenin's uncompromising stance, he preferred to wait until the Congress for the seizure of power. Other senior leaders, including Kamenev and Zinoviev, refused to consider any seizure of power and preferred to form a coalition government with the other socialist parties. In his letters to the party's Central Committee, Lenin voiced fears that if they did not act immediately, Kerensky would crack down on the Bolsheviks and suppress the Constituent Assembly. Perhaps the bourgeois elements in the government would surrender Petrograd, which was in any case full of troublesome socialists, to the Germans. This was unlikely. Instead, Lenin knew that should the Soviet vote to take power, the inevitable result would be a coalition

government between the Bolsheviks, Mensheviks, and SRs, even if the Bolsheviks would be the largest party. The leader of this government would most likely be Kamenev, who championed a policy of compromise with the moderates. Lenin could only ensure that he became head of the government if the Bolsheviks were to take power before the Congress met.

In order to make his case to the party leadership, Lenin decided to return to Petrograd in disguise. He convened a meeting of the Central Committee on 10 October to discuss the question of taking power. Only twelve members out of twenty-one were present at the fateful meeting. The debate was intense, with Kamenev and Zinoviev speaking against an insurrection. By the end of the meeting, a vote was taken. The Central Committee voted ten to two in favor of an armed insurrection, with only Kamenev and Zinoviev voting against. Once again, through sheer force of personality Lenin had managed to convince his fellow party leaders of the necessity for seizing power. Nevertheless, the debate did not address the issue of timing. Lenin still had to persuade his comrades that time was of the essence.

Lenin continued to agitate among the leadership for an immediate insurrection. On 16 October he called another meeting of the Central Committee, to which representatives of the Bolshevik Military Committee were invited, and proposed that the planned armed action should take place before the Congress convened in Petrograd on 20 October. Despite warnings from the military committee that there were many obstacles to a seizure of power, Lenin was unwavering in his determination to pursue an immediate insurrection. When this was put to a vote, Lenin won fifteen to six, demonstrating that not only Kamenev and Zinoviev were concerned about the risks involved in the attempt to seize power. After losing the vote, Kamenev said he could not accept the resolution and would resign from the party, believing that the insurrection would lead the party to ruin. On 18 October, Kamenev and Zinoviev published a piece in Maxim Gorky's paper *Novaya Zhizn'*, referring to the internal party debates and spoke for the need of a socialist coalition government instead of a pure Bolshevik government.

Lenin was incensed at this development, denouncing the two men as traitors to the revolution. By publishing their letter, Kamenev and Zinoviev made the planned Bolshevik insurrection public knowledge and gave both the Soviet and the Provisional Government time to prepare. The Soviet postponed the Congress until 25 October, hoping to gather its forces and prepare for the Bolshevik challenge. In fact, this delay allowed the Bolsheviks to make their

final preparations. A Military Revolutionary Committee (MRC) was set up by Trotsky to oversee the logistics of the operation. Moderate socialists in the Soviet demanded that Trotsky declare the true intention of the Bolsheviks. Trotsky denied that any insurrection was in the works, but his answers were evasive and his performance was unconvincing. Meanwhile, Kerensky remained optimistic. He sought to provoke the Bolsheviks by sending troops from the Petrograd garrison to the front, and on the morning of 24 October ordered loyal troops to take action against the Bolsheviks, giving instructions to close two Bolshevik newspapers. Kerensky also ordered reinforcements from the front, forging the signatures of Soviet leaders since he doubted they would respond to the orders of the Provisional Government alone.

In response, Trotsky put the MRC on standby but did not give the green light for insurrection, since he first hoped to receive the Soviet's support for the action. He described the action as the first steps of a counter-revolution against the Petrograd Soviet, but the moderates were not convinced. Kamenev continued his efforts to rally support for a socialist coalition government. While this was taking place, events overtook the political negotiations in the Soviet. The Red Guards were already on the move, taking control of key points of communication: railway stations, bridges, post and telegraph offices, telephone exchanges, and banks. The Red Guards had also taken over police stations. Lenin was determined to capitalize on these early successes. At 6pm he gave official sanction for the insurrection. The Soviet Congress would be meeting the following afternoon, and it was essential for the takeover to be complete by then. At 10pm, Lenin, despite fear of arrest, decided to make his way to the Smolny Institute wearing his wig with a bandage wrapped around his head. Near the Tauride Palace he was stopped by police who saw him acting suspiciously, but they soon released him for being a harmless drunk. It was a costly mistake to make.

Lenin arrived just before midnight. He was not recognized in his disguise, and he had to struggle to be admitted into the room where the Bolsheviks were deliberating on plans to seize the city. His appearance spurred the Bolshevik leaders into action. The plan was as follows. On the morning of 25 October, Red Guards, Kronstadt sailors, and loyal garrison troops would seize Mariinsky Palace and disperse the Provisional Council which met there. They would then move on to the Winter Palace. The signal for an assault would be given by the Cruiser Aurora, which steamed up the River Neva. By noon, it was expected that the Winter Palace would be taken, and the

Provisional Government would fall, in time for Lenin to announce that the Bolsheviks had taken power in the name of the soviets. In practice, technical difficulties and elementary obstacles meant that after taking control of the Mariinsky Palace, the Bolshevik soldiers and sailors had to postpone their assault on the Winter Palace until the evening.

The Winter Palace was sparsely defended by a few thousand troops, including cadets, reservists, and the Women's Battalion of Death. American journalist John Reed, a Bolshevik sympathizer who later published *Ten Days that Shook the World*, his celebrated account of the revolution, reported that the defensive garrison was drunk, hungry, and resigned to defeat. In fact, most of the soldiers assigned to guard the Winter Palace had left for dinner and never returned. The order for the assault finally came at 9:45pm, with the Kronstadt sailors firing a blank shell from the Aurora. Artillery stationed at the Peter and Paul Fortress on the other side of the Neva fired shells at the palace. The Red Guards entered through a side staircase, while the ministers of the Provisional Government hid in a dining room and waited for the inevitable. Kerensky was not among them, having left for headquarters in the morning in an effort to locate the troops he requested. Sometime after 2am on 26 October, after searching hundreds of rooms of the palace, the Red Guards finally found the ministers and placed them under arrest. The Bolsheviks had overthrown the Provisional Government.

At 10:40pm, while the Red Guards were still in the process of seizing the Winter Palace, the Second All-Russian Congress of Soviets opened at the Smolny Institute. The Bolsheviks, together with their Left SR allies, had a small majority in the Congress. This was not an entirely accurate representation of Bolshevik support across the country, but superior organization by the party allowed them to elect more delegates. As the meeting was underway, Mensheviks and moderate SRs denounced the Bolsheviks for the actions that had taken place, arguing that counter-revolution was inevitable and all the gains made since February were at risk. The moderates walked out of the hall, declaring that they would have nothing to do with the 'criminal venture' that the Bolsheviks were undertaking. As they filed out of the congress hall, Trotsky mocked them with a famous denunciation: "You are pitiful isolated individuals; you are bankrupts; your role is played out. Go where you belong from now on—into the dustbin of history!" The walkout meant that the Bolsheviks were left with a huge majority when the question of the seizure of power was taken to a vote. The

transfer of power to the Bolsheviks was thus officially sanctioned by the Soviet.

Chapter 8 – Peace, Land, and Bread

The armed insurrection which brought the Bolsheviks to power was a relatively modest affair. Unlike the hundreds of thousands of workers, soldiers, and sailors who gathered on the streets in February and July, no more than 25,000 men took part in the assault on the Winter Palace. When the citizens of Petrograd woke up on the morning of 26 October, there was nothing to suggest that power had changed hands. Nevertheless, developments at the Smolny Institute would have significant repercussions for Russia's political future.

Lenin and his fellow Bolsheviks began to sketch out the structure of the new government even before the armed insurrection succeeded. Gathered around Bolshevik Party headquarters at the Smolny, they deliberated on what to call their new government. They were not keen on calling themselves ministers since this would give them the air of bourgeois respectability which they rejected outright. At length, they accepted Trotsky's suggestion of 'people's commissars,' which was inspired by Jacobin France. The new government was therefore called the Council of People's Commissars (Sovnarkom) with Lenin as Chairman and head of government. Key posts were given to senior leaders. Trotsky became People's Commissar for Foreign Affairs, Rykov—Internal Affairs, Lunacharsky—Education, Stalin—Nationalities. Alexandra Kollontai, the only female member of Lenin's government, became People's Commissar for Social Welfare. Significantly, neither Kamenev nor Zinoviev were given portfolios in the government, although the Bolshevized Soviet Congress did elect Kamenev as Chairman of the All-Russian Central Executive Committee, effectively head of state. The party remained divided and Kamenev did not believe Lenin's government would last for more than a couple of weeks.

Once in control of the government, Lenin was faced with the task not only of transforming Russia into a socialist state but also addressing the numerous political issues that the Provisional Government had failed to address, which eventually led to its downfall. On 26 October, Lenin presented two decrees on peace and land to the Soviet Congress, which dutifully passed them. The Decree on Peace signaled to the participants in the First World War that a 'just and democratic peace' should be made between the warring nations

without territorial or financial compensation. At the same time, Lenin echoed US President Woodrow Wilson's call for national self-determination. National units within larger political entities should have the right to independence. Lenin called for an armistice to be agreed upon immediately between the two sides and for negotiations to take place as part of a peace conference. Perhaps more radically, Lenin declared that the new Bolshevik government would publicize the secret clauses and agreements made between Russian and foreign diplomats during the Tsarist and Provisional governments. This was a major departure from centuries of secret diplomacy in Russia as in the rest of Europe. Negotiations were opened with the Germans and ended with the Treaty of Brest-Litovsk, signed in March 1918. Despite its punitive terms, Lenin believed he was taking one step back in order to take two steps forward in an effort to consolidate the Soviet power.

The second decree, the Decree on Land, addressed the question of land redistribution, an issue of particular concern to the peasantry over the course of 1917. Although the SRs continued to enjoy high levels of popularity among the peasantry, their failure to take any action on the question resulted in a decline in support, especially in urban centers. Lenin's decree abolished the property rights of the imperial family, the aristocracy, and the Russian Orthodox Church, transferring ownership of the land to peasant committees and Soviets. It is worth noting that the decree resembled SR policy far more than it did Bolshevik policy, which envisaged that all land would be transferred to state ownership. Lenin recognized that the Bolsheviks lacked support in the countryside and in order to gain control of the whole country, the Bolsheviks had to give some concessions to the peasants. Of course, the fact that Lenin was now operating the levers of power meant that once the Bolsheviks were to consolidate their power in the countryside, the policy could be changed at any moment and Lenin's government could decide appropriate the land from the peasants for the state.

Another key issue for Lenin's government was the fate of the ethnic minorities in the Russian Empire. Communist doctrine stated that national entities should be allowed to determine their own fates, and one of the elements of Lenin's Decree on Peace was to this effect. However, when the question turned to Russia, the Bolsheviks were in a difficult position. The periphery of the Russian Empire included key economic resources, without which Russia would be impoverished. Ukraine in particular was the breadbasket of the Russian Empire, and in times of peace provided the rest of

the country with abundant quantities of grain. In 1913 Stalin published the theoretical work *Marxism and the National Question*, which concluded that the grievances of minorities lay not in the lack of independence but the lack of autonomy, especially on linguistic, educational, and cultural matters. Lenin supported Stalin's position on the issue and regarded him as the leading theoretician on the national issue, which led to his appointment as People's Commissar of the Nationalities. Nevertheless, when the issue came to a debate among the people's commissars on 2 November, the government declared that ethnic minorities had the right to break away and become fully independent. This declaration was made despite Lenin and Stalin's opposition, suggesting that the Sovnarkom was by no means Lenin's one-man show.

As Marxists, Lenin's government was also keen to create an equal society. On 10 November, the government abolished legal distinctions of privilege, including titles and ranks. This was a major development in the structure of Russian society. The Table of Ranks, which had been introduced by Peter the Great in 1722 in order to create a meritocratic culture in the army and government but was subsequently used to for purposes of social distinction among the higher echelons of Russian society, was abolished by Lenin. Instead, every man, woman, and child would become a citizen of Russian Republic. The convoluted forms of address which accompanied the Table of Ranks were also eliminated. Instead, men and women would address each other simply as 'citizen' or 'comrade.' The former greeting had been in common use since the February Revolution, but the Bolsheviks preferred 'comrade' as a result of their proletarian instincts. Over the subsequent months, courts became democratically elected and ranks within the army were abolished.

The policies pursued by Sovnarkom immediately after the revolution appeared to reflect their intentions to create a free and fair society. However, a much darker side to Bolshevik rule also began to emerge. Few expected the Bolshevik government to last long, and there were many elements of society irreconciled to the continued prospect of Bolshevik rule. It should also be stressed that taking power in Petrograd did not mean taking control of the whole of Russia. It took ten days for the Bolsheviks to seize control of Moscow, and large parts of southern Russia declared in favor of right-wing Cossack generals. Kerensky himself was gathering troops to retake Petrograd, and the influential railway union argued that the socialist parties should

cooperate to face the challenge, as it had done during the Kornilov Affair, or face the prospect of defeat. Lenin sent Bolsheviks to negotiate with the unions, but the defeat of Kerensky's forces at the Pulkovo Heights to the south of Petrograd meant that the Bolsheviks were no longer interested. In the meantime, Lenin gave orders to close down newspapers not only of the liberal bourgeoisie but also of rival socialist parties, which caused outrage among the Mensheviks and SRs as well as moderate Bolsheviks. Lenin was keen to transform the Russian Republic into a one-party state.

The socialist opposition to the Bolsheviks placed their hopes in the elections to the Constituent Assembly in the hope that this would dilute Bolshevik influence in the country's political institutions. The Constituent Assembly had been envisaged from March as the supreme representative institution that would decide on key constitutional and political issues that faced the country. The closest antecedent in Russia was the Assembly of the Land summoned in 1612 to elect a new tsar after the extinction of the previous ruling dynasty. Despite the Bolshevik seizure of power, Lenin did not move to abolish the Constituent Assembly and allowed elections to take place as planned. Official statements from Sovnarkom recognized the supreme authority of the forthcoming assembly. Indeed, the Bolsheviks campaigned passionately all around the country as polling took place, including among soldiers at the front, over the course of several weeks in November.

It soon became clear that the Bolsheviks would not only fail to win a majority in the new assembly but that it would not even emerge as the largest party. When the final results were declared, the Socialist Revolutionaries won an impressive 40 percent of the vote and a majority in terms of seats, demonstrating that it retained much of its support from the Russian countryside. The Bolsheviks came in second place with 24 percent, while the Mensheviks gained 3 percent. The Kadets, conservatives, and nationalist parties polled in the single digits. The SR victory in the elections to the Constituent Assembly undermined Lenin's claims that the Bolsheviks had taken power on behalf of the people. On closer inspection, however, the Bolsheviks did perform very strongly among the urban proletariat, which was always going to be the active force in a Marxist revolution. In Petrograd and Moscow, the Bolsheviks won a little less than 50 percent of the vote and also recorded large majorities among soldiers at the front.

The fact that the Bolsheviks did not receive the level of support they expected hardened Bolshevik attitudes towards the Constituent Assembly. Lenin

claimed that the SRs could not command a majority in the assembly since the party had split into two separate factions, the Left and Right SRs, in the summer. The assembly was scheduled to be convened on 28 November, but that morning Kronstadt sailors carried out the arrest of the Kadet deputies on Sovnarkom's orders and postponed the opening of the assembly until January 1918. When the assembly finally met on 5 January at the Tauride Palace, it elected Viktor Chernov as chairman and voted to reject the Lenin's decrees on land and peace, endorsing SR proposals instead. At 1am the Bolsheviks walked out of the meeting, describing the body as serving the interests of the counter-revolution. The meeting adjourned at 6am, but by the time the deputies returned at noon they were denied entry and informed that the assembly had been shut down by the Council of People's Commissars.

Lenin justified his action by arguing that Constituent Assembly had been established by the Provisional Government and therefore represented bourgeois interests. Since the Soviet had already taken power in October, there was no longer any need for the Constituent Assembly. Although relegated to a footnote of the narrative of the events of the revolution by many historians, the suppression of the Constituent Assembly represented a pivotal moment in both the revolution and Russian history in as a whole. The opposition to the Bolsheviks could no longer count on representative institutional bodies to challenge Bolshevik authority. Civil war was inescapable. It would not be a simple class war between socialists on one side and capitalists on the other. Instead, the Bolsheviks and their fellow socialist parties would fight on different sides, if not necessarily on opposite sides.

Chapter 9 – Defending the Revolution

At the beginning of 1918 the Bolsheviks consolidated their control of Petrograd, but there was still much to do in terms of extending their authority across the whole country. Russian soldiers were still fighting in the war and feared that Petrograd would fall to the Germans. In March, the capital was relocated to Moscow. After its suppression in Petrograd, the Constituent Assembly relocated to the Siberian city of Samara on the Volga and set up a rival government. In the south, a number of right-wing monarchist generals and their armies raised their banners in an effort to crush the Bolshevik government. These forces gradually coalesced into the White movement, although coordination between the generals was difficult to achieve due to personal animosities and geographical distance. In 1918 and 1919, three White armies, supported by small contingents of foreign troops, converged on the capital of Moscow. The largest force was commanded by Admiral Alexander Kolchak, who had captured Samara and taken control of the moderate socialist government. Kolchak, already in control of much of Siberia, therefore assumed the title of Supreme Leader. General Anton Denikin's army approached Moscow from the south, while General Nikolai Yudenich's army threatened Petrograd from the southwest. The lack of coordination between the three armies meant that the Bolsheviks were able to defeat all of them in turn. By the end of 1919, the Bolsheviks gained control of much of Russia, and it was only left to drive out the remnants of Denikin's army under the command of Baron Pyotr Wrangel in the south.

The Bolsheviks enjoyed a number of key advantages which allowed them to defeat the White armies. Most obviously, they could count on greater manpower. While the White armies were able to field several hundred thousand men, the Red Army managed to field five million over the course of the war. The Red Army, under Trotsky's leadership, was far more effectively led and organized than the Whites. The most important factor in the Reds' successes was not political but geographical. The Bolsheviks controlled Russia's European heartland, where its industry and population was concentrated. The center was well connected by railways compared to the periphery, which allowed the Bolsheviks to transport armies from one front to another depending on which sector was under the greatest danger. The

Whites were also operating from territory that was not ethnically Russian and refused to give concessions to non-Russian national entities. Although the Reds also had to fight national independence movements, most significantly the Anarchist Green Army of Nestor Makhno in Ukraine, they were far more prepared to grant concessions of autonomy in exchange for support among the local population in the regions.

The Civil War was accompanied by an increase in repressive measures imposed by the Bolshevik state in its own territory. Fearful that bourgeois elements could rise in support of the approaching White armies, the Bolsheviks aimed to eliminate class enemies. The highest profile of these victims included members of the imperial family. On 17 July, Citizen Nicholas Romanov, the former Tsar Nicholas II, was executed in the Siberian city of Ekaterinburg alongside his wife, five children, and four servants. Grand Duke Mikhail, who had refused the throne on grounds of personal safety, had been killed in June. Several close relations of the imperial family were also killed, although Nicholas II's two sisters Xenia and Olga managed to survive and escaped to the west, along with their mother Dowager Empress Maria Fyodorovna. The Bolshevik's stepped up their repressive measures in September. This was largely the consequence of an assassination attempt on Lenin by the disenchanted Socialist Revolutionary Fanya Kaplan. Between September and October over 100,000 people of all classes and political backgrounds fell victim to a repressive campaign known as the Red Terror. This campaign of repression was orchestrated by the Cheka, the Bolshevik secret police headed by the Polish communist Felix Dzerzhinsky.

By 1921, the Civil War was over, and it seemed as though the victorious Bolsheviks had successfully consolidated their grip on power. However, it was precisely at this point that Lenin faced a series of new challenges from within his enlarged state. The punitive measures imposed on the Soviet population during the war was met with hostility by peasants, who engaged in clashes with Red Army soldiers over the course of the war. By March 1921 the Bolsheviks had lost control of much of the countryside. At the same time, demonstrations in Petrograd over food shortages inspired a mutiny of the Kronstadt sailors. The Kronstadt sailors had been among the most enthusiastic champions of the October Revolution, but the authoritarian manner in which the Bolshevik commissars behaved angered the sailors. Opposition to Lenin was also apparent within the party itself in the form of the Workers' Opposition and the Democratic Centralists, two factions which

opposed Lenin’s policy.

Lenin addressed these three particular issues within the space of a couple of weeks in March 1921. The occasion was the Tenth Party Congress, which opened on 8 March. At the party congress, Lenin announced a ban on factions, which ensured that the party would be united behind Lenin in the future. On 15 October, as the Congress was about to close, Lenin dispatched a military force of 50,000 men under Trotsky to suppress the rebellion, marching across the frozen Gulf of Finland to the Kronstadt naval base. After eighteen hours of fighting, the mutineers were crushed and the survivors taken into captivity. Most significant of all, at the party congress Lenin introduced a radical new economic policy under the unoriginal title of New Economic Policy. Lenin believed that the peasant threat was far greater than that posed by the White armies, and he granted concessions to the peasantry in an effort to regain control of the countryside. He introduced a limited free market in the countryside and ordered an end to the food requisitioning that had been in place during the Civil War. Although the ‘commanding heights’ of the economy would remain under state ownership, it was a radical departure from the previous policy of War Communism, which claimed all produce for the state. The adoption of the NEP as a tactical retreat on the policy front showed that the Bolsheviks were still a long way from fulfilling all the revolutionary objectives.

Conclusion

On 9 March 1923, Lenin suffered the third of three major strokes which left him incapacitated and unable to play a part in government. He finally died on 21 January 1924, mourned by all around him as the leader of the Great October Socialist Revolution, without which the Soviet government would not have existed. His body was later embalmed and placed in a mausoleum on Red Square, where it continues to lie to this day. Lenin's lieutenants already began struggling for power before his death, and after his death these power struggles became public. Trotsky, who was in many ways Lenin's natural successor, was sidelined by his rivals in the Politburo. The man who would eventually emerge victorious was Bolshevik Party General Secretary Josef Stalin, who would rule the Soviet Union until his death in 1953.

During his five years in power Lenin managed to set in motion a complete transformation of Soviet society. He abolished privilege and established equality in law for all Soviet citizens. He moved the capital to Moscow from Petrograd, which was renamed Leningrad after his death. More fundamentally, he changed the Russian language, removing obsolete letters from the Cyrillic alphabet. He changed the calendar, adopting the Gregorian Calendar at the expense of the Julian Calendar, which continues to be used by the Russian Orthodox Church. The Bolsheviks launched an anti-religious campaign which forced the Orthodox Church underground. Lenin's government championed *avant garde* art and literature at the expense of the more restrained bourgeois tastes.

The political events which had taken place in Russia over the course of 1917 had an equally significant impact on the rest of the world. Soviet Russia, from 1922 the Soviet Union, was the first socialist state in history. Although Lenin and Trotsky failed in their attempts to export the revolution to the rest of Europe after the failure to defeat an independent Polish state in the Russo-Polish War of 1920-21, Communist regimes eventually emerged in Eastern Europe, Latin America, Asia, and Africa. The struggle between capitalism, nationalism, and communism defined much of twentieth-century international relations. The Cold War never saw the United States and the Soviet Union come into direct conflict with one another, but proxy wars in Korea and Vietnam caused much bitterness and bloodshed, leaving an

important legacy in the United States. The Soviet invasion of Afghanistan and Cold War dynamics in the Middle East continue to have repercussions to this day.

Yet for all the changes the Bolsheviks brought to Russia and the world, how much did Russian society fundamentally change? For all of the Bolsheviks' egalitarian instincts, Soviet society was undoubtedly hierarchical. A small group of Soviet political elites replaced the old aristocracy, retaining access to luxury items from the west even as these items were absent from stores in Moscow and Leningrad. Much like the tsarist Okhrana, the Bolsheviks had their own secret police, the Cheka, which later morphed into the NKVD and the KGB. Lenin and Stalin demonstrated that they could be as bloody, and usually far more so, as any Romanov tsar. The Soviet state was not as atheistic as it seemed. The cult of Lenin assumed a Messianic character. The banners of Lenin and Stalin, Marx and Engels, which were displayed prominently during Soviet political rallies, were reminiscent of religious icons. The Red Sun of Communism was an echo of pagan belief that remained part of the religious landscape in rural Russia.

The collapse of the Romanov dynasty and the coming to power of the Bolsheviks is often considered historically inevitable. Yet just because a historical event happened does not necessarily mean it was inevitable. The events covered in this book show that there were a number of contingent factors which led to the Bolshevik seizure of power in 1917. The Tsarist state, although under heavy pressure in the beginning of the 20th century, only collapsed due to the political and economic pressure in Petrograd caused by the First World War. Even after Nicholas decided to abdicate, it was conceivable that his son Alexei could continue ruling at the head of a constitutional monarchy.

The Provisional Government that emerged following the February Revolution was subjected to both internal and external pressure, forced to navigate the narrow path between left and right while remaining committed to the Allied cause in the war. Nevertheless, it almost survived until the Constituent Assembly elections. It is clear that without Lenin's uncompromising stance in opposition to the Provisional Government, as well his insistence that the Bolsheviks should launch an insurrection before the Soviet decided to take power, the nature of the government would have been very different, most likely a coalition government between the SRs, Mensheviks, and Bolsheviks. Once the Bolsheviks had taken power in

October, it took them almost four years to consolidate it.

Looking back on the tumultuous events of 1917, Soviet propaganda gave the impression that the Bolsheviks easily took power in October on a wave of popular support. Without Lenin at the helm of the party, the Bolsheviks would never have taken power, at least not on its on accord and not in 1917. As this book seeks to demonstrate, Lenin’s path to power was far more complicated than it seems.

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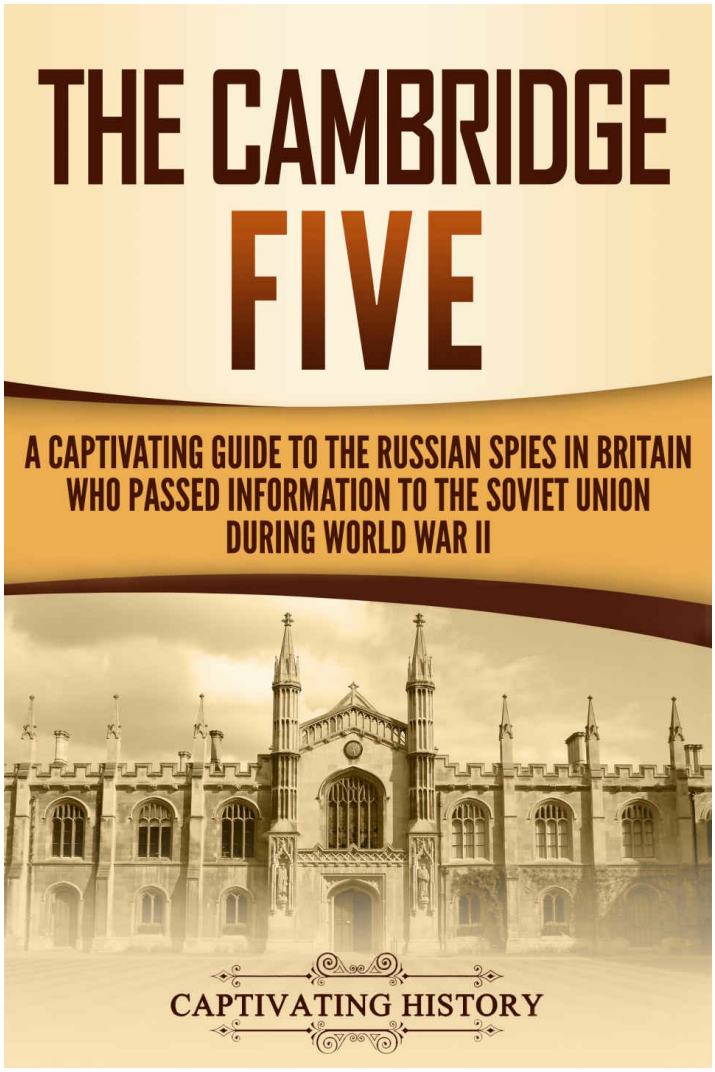
Part 4: The Cambridge Five

A Captivating Guide to the Russian Spies in Britain Who Passed Information to the Soviet Union During World War II


THE CAMBRIDGE
FIVE
A CAPTIVATING GUIDE TO THE RUSSIAN SPIES IN BRITAIN WHO PASSED INFORMATION TO THE SOVIET UNION DURING WORLD WAR II
CAPTIVATING HISTORY

Introduction

During the poverty-stricken years of the Great Depression, when Britain's financial markets plummeted and the poor and wealthy alike doubted the economic systems in which they participated, the potential of one political ideal shone like no other: Communism. Young intellectuals from the country's very best schools discussed the premise of labor-value versus wealth-value, and a great many of them became card-carrying members of the Communist Party in Britain.

It was exactly the kind of hunting ground the Soviet Union needed to recruit high-level agents to their cause. Over the course of the early 1930s, five students of Cambridge University were handpicked by Soviet agents and instructed to use their status as educated members of the British elite to serve the U.S.S.R.

Anthony Blunt, Guy Burgess, Donald Maclean, Kim Philby, and John Cairncross accepted the offer and in doing so changed the course of WWII and the Cold War. Their actions were not discovered until the 1950s, long after the war was finished and the damage—or achievements, depending which side you were on—had already been done.

Chapter 1 – The Undeniable Attraction of Marxism

Imagine a world in which a child is not born into poverty while his neighbor is born into a palace of excess. A world where workers are valued more than kings and emperors—indeed, where kings and emperors no longer exist at all. This imaginary world is populated by productive people who all enjoy a living wage, reasonable working hours in safe facilities, free health care and state services, plus free education for themselves and their families. Though services and businesses flourish, they are non-profit organizations whose earnings are shared equally with employees. The potential for such a world has existed in the mind of the true Marxist, communist, and socialist for two centuries.

The world in which the Second World War and the Cold War took place seemed to offer such a haven in the form of the Soviet Union, and it was in support of these basic communist ideals that Joseph Stalin, leader of that union of socialist nations, recruited many international spies. Of course, by the time Stalin took power, the dream of Marxism had already been terribly warped.

Named for one of its most famous philosophers, Marxism is the economic and political system described by Karl Marx and Fredrich Engels in their groundbreaking 1848 book, *The Communist Manifesto*. In the pages of what is now heralded as one of the world's most influential political documents, the authors assert that the member of all societies who must be valued the most is the proletariat—the worker. Communism, therefore, according to Marx and Engels, would put an end to the class divisions that separated the valuable workers of the world from supposedly highborn or wealthy individuals, ending the game of capitalism for the good of all people. Though the premise of *The Communist Manifesto* is very closely aligned with various types of socialism at the time, there was one very important difference: While socialist groups called for reform, the communists called for revolution. The final words of the manifesto are infamous: "Working men of all countries, unite!"

The same year the book was published, a series of revolutions swept through Europe in which the common people—including serfs, workers, and ideological reformers—demanded an end to poor living conditions at the

hands of various monarchies. These revolutionary coalitions succeeded in ending serfdom in both Austria and Hungary, bringing an end to the absolute monarchy in Denmark, and establishing democracy in the Netherlands.

The gleam of Marxism was so powerful to the working classes of Russia that a full-scale revolution was mounted in 1917. Led by Vladimir Lenin, the Red Army violently arrested and later executed all members of the royal Romanov family, including Tsar Nikolai II. Troops and commoners stormed the massive and opulent Winter Palace in St. Petersburg, furiously smashing and gutting the lavish interior and claiming it public domain. The Russian Revolution rid the nation of its centuries-long monarchical system and installed Lenin as the de-facto leader of all Russia. Lenin, although technically president of his country, was more often called Comrade Lenin in honor of the group's beliefs concerning the equality of all people—in fact, the original motto of the Communist Party was inevitably changed to "Workers of the world, unite!" to include both sexes. All Communists under the leadership of Vladimir Lenin referred to each other as "comrade."

The Russian Revolution was a messy affair, marred by the blood of the Romanovs and eventually the casualties of both Bolsheviks and Mensheviks (literally the "majority" and "minority" factions of the Social Democratic Party) during a civil war that broke out almost simultaneously with World War I. Fighting continued between the various socialist groups of Russia until enough of them decided to cross over and join the Bolshevik Red Army. In 1922, Russia transformed itself and much of Europe and Asia into the United Soviet Socialist Republic —the U.S.S.R. It was the first modern nation of its kind, in which the principles of equality, valued labor, and resource sharing were said to have been used in place of market capitalism, low-wage labor, and wealth-based authoritarianism.

Lenin's leadership of Russia and then the U.S.S.R. is considered the most ideologically sound communist government the nation ever had. When he died in 1924, Joseph Stalin took over as leader of the Communist Party and the conglomerate of socialist nations under the title General Secretary. Though Lenin himself had at first put full faith in his comrade, he learned shortly before his death of the violent atrocities Stalin had performed in the name of the party. While Lenin, having suffered a stroke in 1922, convalesced away from the government, Stalin was imposing a brutal regime in Georgia. Lenin's final will questioned the ability of either Stalin or Trotsky —another top political ideologist—to handle the pressures of high office.

Nevertheless, Stalin would lead the U.S.S.R. from Lenin's death in 1924 until his own death in 1953, warping the original ideals of communism to exploit his office and benefit himself.

Despite the fact that Russia and its satellite nations had fallen victim to yet another oligarchy, falsely in the name of communism, the U.S.S.R. was proud and fiercely protective of itself. With its food and resource inequity hidden from the rest of the world, the U.S.S.R. continued to tout a banner of equality and plentitude that fooled many international economic philosophers and reformists. Among these were Donald Maclean, Guy Burgess, Kim Philby, Anthony Blunt, and John Cairncross—the now-infamous Cambridge Five, who believed so strongly in the principles of Marxism that they were convinced to betray their own government in favor of the Soviet Union. It was a highly irregular move for graduates of one of England's most prestigious schools.

Chapter 2 – Students of Prestige

Donald Maclean, Guy Burgess, Kim Philby, Anthony Blunt, and John Cairncross all attended Cambridge University and graduated there in the early 1930s. Though all were from successful households, their backgrounds ranged from tradespeople to bankers and even—in the case of Anthony Blunt—a familial relationship to the late Queen Mother Elizabeth Angela Marguerite Bowes-Lyon, mother of Queen Elizabeth II. Kim Philby was perhaps the most unlikely of the group to be allowed to attend Cambridge, having been born in India, son to a mother who converted to Islam and a father who served Saudi Arabian King Ibn Saud. Philby earned his place at the university with an academic scholarship.

Cambridge University, founded in 1209 in the English town of the same name, was one of the first formal education centers in all Europe. Though the admissions criteria have been largely liberalized since the Middle Ages—when only males from wealthy and important families could attend—Cambridge is still one of the most elite schools to which British families of means hope to send their children. This was particularly true in the Victorian and Neo-Georgian periods, between 1837 and 1936, before admissions really opened up to women and students of varied economic backgrounds.

During the early part of the 20th century, communism was quite rampant in universities such as Cambridge, with a significant number of students ideologically in favor of Marxism as described in *The Communist Manifesto*. To Donald Maclean, whose political family had sent him to a well-known liberal school called Gresham's before Cambridge, and to Kim Philby, already an idealist thanks to his parents' uncommon religious and political choices, the Communist Party offered just what they were looking for.

They weren't alone in this belief, either. Cairncross, who came from a large family whose wealth relied on their own ironmongery business, was one of the relatively rare Scottish students admitted by Cambridge. Having a stable income that warranted the highest-quality education, he still possessed the view of an outsider when he attended school in England. Like Philby, Cairncross was part of the informal second class of the time, as the importance of British citizens who came from outside of England proper were downplayed.

As for Burgess, his family had become wealthy in the financial industry after relocating to England as refugee French Huguenots in the 16th century.

Initially interested in a military career, an optical condition forced Burgess to rethink his career plans. While considering his options, he attended the rampantly classist Eton College and became popular among his peers despite his out-of-place and blatant left-wing opinions. Having won a scholarship to Cambridge in 1930, he made the switch and was voted head of the Trinity Historical Society, which Philby was also a member of.

Blunt was the most privileged of the group, his father being the Reverend Arthur Stanley Vaughan Blunt and he personally attending afternoon tea on several occasions at the home of the Bowes-Lyons. A known homosexual, which was illegal in the early part of the 20th century, Blunt joined the Cambridge Apostles while at school—a small group of intellectual men who convened weekly to discuss topics they deemed important. Covertly known as something of a haven for gay students, the Apostles membership also included Guy Burgess, another known homosexual. Not all the students who would come to be known as the Cambridge Five joined the Apostles, but all are believed to have joined the Communist Party of Great Britain during their time at Cambridge University. While Philby perhaps did not, he did join the World Federation for the Relief of the Victims of German Fascism in Paris, a front for a communist-supporting group under the leadership of German Willi Münzenberg.

A few years older than the other men, Anthony Blunt graduated university first and stayed on to become a member of the teaching staff. In his role as Cambridge don, Blunt actually traveled to the Soviet Union in 1933, though researchers can’t be sure whether he was recruited by the U.S.S.R. at that point or later on. What is clear is that his friend Burgess became a Soviet patriot the very next year. Thanks to the recommendation of Kim Philby—who had recently joined the Soviet ministry in secret—Burgess came to the attention of a man called Arnold Deutsch.

Deutsch was a Soviet intelligence officer in search of British recruits who could serve the U.S.S.R. from international positions of power. He was looking specifically for British citizens who could gain entry to any event or venue—so who better than the highly-educated members of Britain’s upper and upper-middle classes? Deutsch, whose background remains mostly hidden from record, was born in eastern Europe and, thanks to an excellent academic record, was able to move to London to study psychology. His enrollment at the University of London covered up the fact that he was really in England operating as a spy for the OMS, Russia’s International Liaison

Department. A dedicated Communist, Arnold happily discovered that a great number of Britain's wealthy university students were idealistic communists without any practical outlet for their political and economic beliefs. Cambridge University was the perfect recruiting ground for the Soviet Union's espionage program.

After meeting with Deutsch, Kim Philby became the first of the famous Five (unless Blunt had already done so the previous year) to declare himself for the U.S.S.R. instead of Great Britain. For Philby, perhaps it was not such an unprecedented decision; born in India to politically and religiously unorthodox parents, Kim Philby was not the average wealthy son of Cambridge University. His views were as nonconformist as those of his parents, and the sparkle of communism was strong. Philby was probably the first of the Cambridge Five to be recruited into the service of the U.S.S.R, but many of his contemporaries proved just as eager to do the same.

To step outside of the conservative ring of elite Londoners and British families seemed a strange move for students whose wealth was sufficient to prepare them for a university like Cambridge, let alone pay the tuition fees. Nevertheless, the students' attachment to the fundamentals of communism often proved to be pure and lifelong. At the time, Britain was still attempting to weather a financial crisis that seemed to signify a failure of the capitalist system itself, as countries in North America and Europe were suffering terribly during the Great Depression. Amongst the wealthy socialist sympathizers in Britain, it seemed high time for an economic shift.

Through that first contact, recruiter Arnold Deutsch—codenamed "Otto"—found just the team he was looking for. Philby, Maclean, Blunt, Cairncross, and Burgess all eventually agreed to find strategic placement within key areas of British intelligence, security, and foreign affairs offices and use the information they collected there to benefit the cause of the Soviet Union.

Chapter 3 – Anthony Blunt: Teacher, Lover, Recruiter

It’s not quite clear exactly when Anthony Blunt swore his allegiance to the Soviet Union, but it seems most likely that it happened in 1933 or 1934 while he was still teaching at Cambridge. Quite a young professor, Blunt was heavily invested in the Cambridge Apostles as a way to connect personally with other intelligent young men and potentially find candidates for romantic endeavors. When he met Guy Burgess in 1931, he’d found a kindred spirit who shared an interest in art, politics, and intellectualism.

Though Blunt denies anything but friendship between himself and the alcohol-swilling socialite Burgess, fellow students reported that the two started a love affair during their first years together at the university. Though the (purported) passion didn’t last, the friendship did—and so did their idealistic conversations about the merits of communism. In fact, Guy Burgess is the reason Blunt became a Communist and anti-fascist in the first place. Though it has also been suggested that Blunt, as Burgess’ senior, convinced the latter to take on the cause, Blunt himself told post-Cold War interviewers that he was first drawn to communism because of Guy.

“Cambridge had been hit by Marxism and…most of my friends among my junior contemporaries—including Guy Burgess—had either joined the Communist Party or were at least very close to it politically,” Blunt wrote in his memoirs.

While Burgess found his own link to the Soviet spy ring after leaving school, Blunt signed on with The People’s Commissariat for Internal Affairs, or NKVD—the interior ministry of the U.S.S.R. Originally a police task force, the NKVD was reorganized in 1934 to oversee the functions of all Soviet government ministries, including the secret police. Officers of the NKVD conducted mass murders in the name of Joseph Stalin in an attempt to cleanse the Communist Party of rich landowners and minority ethnicities. They are even reported to have driven mobile gas chambers in which executions could be carried out on location.

Presumably, these acts were unknown to the world outside the Soviet Union, Anthony Blunt and his colleagues included. As far as Blunt was told by his contacts in England, the Soviets were upholding the ideals of Marxism as best they could and were in need of international compatriots to help them

carry out that work. Presumably when he'd visited the U.S.S.R. in 1933, Blunt saw nothing to negate this, and so he complied with the requests of the NKVD and sought out events and people from whom he might learn something of use to his Soviet controllers. Specifically, he was asked to help recruit like-minded young members of the elite university where he worked.

Outwardly, Anthony cultivated a reputation for himself as a premier art history expert. He published his first book in 1940 called *Artistic Theory in Italy, 1450-1600*. The next year he published *François Mansart and the Origins of French Classical Architecture*. Though his love and professional expertise in regards to fine art were pure, behind the scenes, he had become a double agent for both the Soviets and the British. On top of his loyalty to the NKVD, he also swore to uphold the critical office of MI5, British Military Intelligence.

As a member of MI5, Blunt had access to decoded messages that had been picked up from German transmissions. This type of information was referred to as "Ultra," and Blunt was responsible for obtaining Ultra and passing it on to the Soviets. Though the protocol at Britain's secret intelligence complex was very strict, calling for each radio operator, decoder, translator, and other workers to only pass on information to one particular link in the chain, the process was not without its weak points. Reliant on the use of paper, individual notes could be removed from the intelligence buildings with relative ease.

Blunt didn't hold back. He collected everything he could safely get his hands on and dumped stacks and stacks of intelligence information on to the Soviet Union. The data was so plentiful it actually caused Stalin to second-guess the loyalty of Blunt as a spy. Suspicious that his British operative was not only a double agent but a triple agent, the Soviet leader wondered if the masses of Ultra were fake. Though he didn't end Blunt's contract with NKVD, Stalin made a point of carefully checking his data against that of other spies. One such spy, John Cairncross, was also hard at work nearby in the same complex. Though the two held roles of such secrecy that they probably didn't even meet each other there, they were not only schoolmates but double-agenting colleagues. Such was the fate of the Cambridge Five: always working shoulder-to-shoulder, usually without even knowing it.

Chapter 4 – Burgess: A Mole Within the BBC

As for Guy Burgess, he abandoned his graduate studies at Cambridge in 1935 after several failed attempts to complete his doctoral work. It is generally considered to be the fault of his attention span rather than any intellectual failing that kept Burgess from achieving a doctorate and a teaching position at Cambridge.

Despite this, Burgess found employment with the mother of one of his wealthy school chums. Upon accepting the position, he was paid 100 pounds per month to advise the wealthy woman on her financial investments. An almost exorbitant amount of money, even for a Cambridge graduate, Burgess did the little work required of him and used the income to fund fact-finding trips to Germany, where Nazism had taken root. The trips coincided with Burgess' prompt announcement to all who would listen that he had given up on communism and now supported the fascism of Italian dictator Benito Mussolini. He also formed a new club: the Anglo-German Fellowship, in which members ostensibly discussed the good deeds of the leader of the Nazi Party, Adolf Hitler. It was all a cover for the fact that he had become a Communist under the guidance of the OMS.

In 1936, Burgess secured a job at the British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC). Burgess was appointed assistant manager in the Talks Department, a role that required him to set up interviews with personalities who would fascinate radio listeners. As Guy was a popular and well-networked young man, he had no trouble arranging for interviews with people of note—including Anthony Blunt and Jack Philby, noted Arab enthusiast and explorer who was the father to none other than Kim Philby. Though Burgess met with Winston Churchill several times, he was not successful in securing the would-be British prime minister for a radio interview.

Though Burgess was well-liked by a range of people, his colleagues at the BBC were not quite so fond of him as had been his university peers. It was said that not only was Guy constantly overindulging in alcohol but that he was both a snob and a disorderly slob. Said fellow BBC employee Gorley Putt of his colleague: "It amazed me, much later in life, to learn that [Guy Burgess] had been irresistibly attractive to most people he met."

The administrative assistant of the Talks Department wrote a report of Burgess that is still in the BBC files today, admonishing him for rarely appearing at the office until after 10:45. She went on to say that even with

such a late starting hour, the assistant manager soon left for the rest of the day to make contacts.

Rather used to a life of luxury and privilege, Burgess made no attempt to change his behavior after taking on the job. Indeed, he used the BBC’s expense accounts to cover charges for everything from a night out drinking to first-class coach tickets. Said one note to Burgess from a higher authority within the BBC: “It requires a very strong character to reduce this expenditure but the attempt should certainly be made."

Despite repeated meetings with his employers, during which they pleaded with Burgess to rein it in, Guy was unconvinced that he should make any changes to his methods. "I normally travel first class and see no reason why I should alter my practice when on BBC business, particularly when I'm in my best clothes." Burgess became synonymous with this sort of egotistical and flamboyant attitude during his time with the BBC.

According to Jean Seaton, official BBC historian, "He was making contacts, and they said he was spending too much. All of that was partly the way he was, partly spying, and partly doing the BBC's work." This is almost certainly true. Essentially at this point in both his professional and secret career, Burgess needed to meet as many influential people as possible and give them a good enough time that they would be happy to meet with and talk to him regularly. The more relaxed Burgess’ guests, the lower their guard and the more secrets they would be willing to spill.

While working for the BBC, Burgess was contacted by MI6, the UK’s Secret Intelligence Service, who questioned whether Guy would consider performing a few small tasks for them. The communication wasn’t a coincidence, nor was it due to Anthony Blunt. In fact, the OMS had earlier instructed their willing operative to befriend David Footman, author of the 1936 novel *Pig and Pepper*. According to the OMS, Footman was a member of MI6—a fact that would not be surprising in later years when his books turned from fanciful fiction to darkly contemplative conspiracy novels and non-fiction, mostly concerning Russia. Burgess did as he was instructed and charmed the author. Not long afterward, Footman introduced Burgess to his MI6 superior officer, Valentine Vivian.

Vivian agreed that Burgess, given his vast social network and easy charm, was a good fit for the secret service. Before hiring him on, however, Vivian had Burgess work undercover part-time as a sort of volunteer. One of his jobs

was to relay communications between British Prime Minister Neville Chamberlain and French President Edouard Daladier before they were due to join a summit in Germany in 1938. After a year and a half of such chores, MI6 was ready to bring on their new recruit full-time. The timing was ideal because Guy Burgess had had enough of his job at the BBC.

The failed meeting with Winston Churchill irked Burgess, who often could talk anyone into visiting the studio for an interview. When the British government vetoed Burgess' choice of interviewees multiple times at the station in 1938, he believed Churchill was behind it and became furious. Seeing no further reason to continue the job, he resigned. That same year Burgess accepted a job with MI6, the UK's Secret Intelligence Service. Already employed with the OMS, this made Burgess a dangerous double agent.

Having procured a social knowledge of Britain's and Europe's top politicians and made a name for himself in one of the nation's most trustworthy organizations, Guy Burgess was finally poised exactly where the Soviet Union wanted him: within Britain's own security forces. Now the real work of spying could begin.

Chapter 5 – Maclean and the Spanish Civil War

Though he had been a vocal proponent of Marxism during his Cambridge days, Donald Maclean told the British government that those days were far behind him when he applied to the civil service post-graduation. They took his word for it, and by 1935, Maclean was working at the British Foreign Office on location in London. He was the first of the Cambridge Five to hold a British government job and became privy to sensitive internal data that related to the League of Nations as well as Spain, Portugal, Switzerland, and the Netherlands. After a year at the job, Maclean's network widened to include Germany, Italy, and the U.S.S.R. His most important role during those early years within the Foreign Office was with a specialized group whose objective was to bring a swift end to the Spanish Civil War.

It was 1936 when Spain collapsed into warring factions. On one side, there was the democratically-elected President Manuel Azaña, a Republican who represented socialist ideals and a continued break with the Spanish monarchy. He was in favor of maintaining the Second Spanish Republic of 1931, in which the royal family was stripped of power. Azaña had overwhelming support from voters, and as president, he banned church-operated schools and charity organizations, gave funding to public schools, reduced military funding, and promised to redistribute large privately-held lands to poor farmers.

On the opposing side, there was General Francisco Franco. A powerful and influential person within the military, Franco had other political ideas—specifically, a return to the military dictatorship that had been in place under King Alfonso XIII. Aware of Franco's dedication to authoritarian rule, Azaña had his General Military Academy closed and stationed him far away from the influential cities of Spain. Still, Franco's military support was called in during riots after a right-wing party won local elections, and when he was through, there were 4,000 people dead. Popularity with the right-wing faction of government got Franco put back in a position of power as the army chief of staff, and when further elections placed more Republicans in the government, the general started to discuss putting together a *coup d'état*.

From the safe distance of Morocco, Franco contacted Nazi Germany and Fascist Italy for help with weapons while he mobilized loyal Spanish troops back to the mainland. There, after a series of surprise attacks, Franco gained control of much of the western side of Spain. War began between Franco's

Nationalists and Azaña's Republicans that incited members of other European nations to take part. Volunteer troops arrived from Great Britain—including the author George Orwell—to support the socialist government. It was considered a peasant and middle-class leftist war versus a high-class fascist war, and the Soviets were clearly on the side of the left. That included their operative, Donald Maclean.

At home in the UK, Maclean worked as part of the Non-Intervention Committee to establish and maintain a monitoring system to keep tabs on the major parties influencing the Spanish Civil War. Their goal was to keep a hands-off profile to the war while covertly preventing key people and information from reaching the warring factions within Spain. Essentially, this meant that at most outside nations could send supplies and volunteer troops, but they were not to send national armies. Though the committee was comprised of members from various European countries, its members likely held little hope of quashing the violence in Spain since both Germany and Italy were present and sending arms to the state in question. There was one very important goal of the committee, however, and that was the agreement between voluntary attending countries not to actually join the war for either side. Germany and Italy declared soon after the coup that Spain's true government was that of the Nationalists and General Franco.

Throughout 1937 and 1938, Donald Maclean stole countless documents from the Non-Intervention Committee and met with Soviet agent Kitty Harris at her Bayswater apartment to photograph and send the evidence to Stalin. Reportedly, the pair took photos of 45 boxes of documents during that time to keep the U.S.S.R. as up-to-date as possible on British policy regarding Spain. Like the other members of the British-led committee, the Soviet Union agreed not to become formally involved in the war, but Stalin did supply the Republicans with thousands of aircraft, tanks, armored cars, and weapons. Spain's Republican government paid for the supplies in gold, having at that point one of the world's largest gold reserves. Two-thirds of it were shipped back to the Soviets.

After three years of warfare between the Republicans and the Nationalists, Franco held most of the power. Britain and France declared General Franco the leader of Spain, believing that non-intervention had successfully kept Europe from collapsing into its own international war. They may have put it off for a few years, but once Franco was in power, a major European war was just a few months away.

Chapter 6 – World War II: Espionage Between Allies

The infighting may have ended in Spain at the beginning of 1939, but by September, the leader of Germany's Nazi government, Adolf Hitler, had invaded Poland and sent Europe spiraling right back into war. Intent on nothing less than world domination and ethnic cleansing in favor of the Aryan race, Hitler's National Socialist Party was anything but. Claiming "Our fight is with money. Work alone will help us, not money. We must smash interest slavery. Our fight is with the races that represent money" as early as 1919, Hitler was either using populist socialism to achieve office, or he was genuinely confused about its premise. In either case, his army's attack on Poland finally prompted the European non-interventionists to step in. Great Britain and France declared war on Germany and its allies on September 3, 1939, in a speech given by British Prime Minister Neville Chamberlain.

> We shall enter it with a clear conscience, with the support of the Dominions and the British Empire, and the moral approval of the greater part of the world.
>
> We have no quarrel with the German people, except that they allow themselves to be governed by a Nazi Government. As long as that Government exists and pursues the methods it has so persistently followed during the last two years, there will be no peace in Europe. We shall merely pass from one crisis to another, and see one country after another attacked by methods which have now become familiar to us in their sickening technique.
>
> We are resolved that these methods must come to an end. If out of the struggle we again re-establish in the world the rules of good faith and the renunciation of force, why, then even the sacrifices that will be entailed upon us will find their fullest justification.

Over the course of the next few months, Britain scrambled to bolster its intelligence resources and train operatives in communications, codes, procedures, and protocols within the MI5 and MI6 secret services. For the Cambridge Five, that meant every one of them was now positioned deep within the British government: Cairncross and Maclean were at the Foreign Office, Burgess was in MI6, Philby was at the War Office, and Blunt was

with MI5. Just as Arnold Deutsch had hoped, his British communist recruits were exactly the sort of dedicated spy ring the Soviets had wanted to create.

At the outbreak of the Second World War, the Soviet Union declared itself an enemy of Germany and therefore an ally of Great Britain and the other Allied countries. As such, the work the Cambridge spies were contracted to do for NKVD probably seemed natural enough—after all, what was the harm in sharing wartime codes and facts with an ally? Of course, Great Britain never fully trusted the Soviet Union despite having a mutual enemy. Therefore, the UK made an effort only to share extremely pertinent information with the Soviets so that the Nazis could be stopped. The Cambridge Five merely filled in the large gaps.

It was probably one of the most seemingly moral righteous jobs any spy ever took on; though had Britain known its own operatives were illegally sharing information, it would have been considered treason. To the Cambridge operatives, however, who still believed Stalin's Soviet government was of a true and beneficial communist structure, they were helping the war effort perhaps more than their own colleagues.

Stalin, however, was not the Marxist he claimed to be. He was a dictator, using Russia's secret police forces to carry out mass murders of individuals who potentially threatened his authority. Before and during the Spanish Civil War, he orchestrated an estimated one million executions in what has been called the Great Purge—or alternatively, the Great Terror. The latter title equates Stalin's atrocities with those of Maximilien Robespierre during the French Revolution. In addition to these executions, the Red Army massacred prisoners of war throughout the Second World War. Evidently, the majority of these facts were unknown to the British secret service until the end of the war, since not one of the Cambridge spies found a reason to abandon his Soviet patriotism during that time.

Though it was indeed the spy ring that was responsible for the transmission of masses of British intelligence data to the Soviet Union, none of it would have been possible if not for the amazing team of communications experts, engineers, and codebreakers working within the British government during the Second World War. These were the men and women whose hard work and intellectual brilliance not only intercepted and decoded the Axis radio traffic but went so far as to invent machines to help them do it more quickly.

As the war continued, the locations and jobs of the Cambridge Five changed

to best accommodate the circumstances. While Philby infiltrated the CIA and MI6, operative Donald Maclean was made privy to conversations between Prime Minister Winston Churchill and U.S. President Franklin Roosevelt at the British Embassy in Cairo, Egypt. The leaders were meeting for the Allied Sextant Conference in November of 1943, an event that was also attended by Chinese Generalissimo Chiang Kai-shek.

Intended as a precursor to the American and British leaders' meeting in Iran with the third prominent Ally, Joseph Stalin, the Cairo meeting was an important opportunity for Churchill to speak with Roosevelt about mobilizing American troops into the Mediterranean instead of France. Britain had already made significant headway into Sicily and probably feared establishing a new war front so close to home. Unfortunately, Roosevelt had more troops to bring to the war effort, and he reminded Churchill of this fact, insisting that they focus on France. The debate was very heated, with military commanders on both sides nearly coming to blows at least once. Maclean oversaw it all and informed Stalin's agents to the outcome of the meeting.

When Josef Stalin met his Allied counterparts in the Iranian capital of Tehran a few days after the Cairo Conference, he was perfectly aware of the outcome at Cairo. The former leader of the Allied movement, Winston Churchill, had been pushed aside by the American president who had taken no advice from the British side. In fact, Roosevelt had spent a great deal of his time in Cairo strategizing with Chinese leader Chiang Kai-shek about the ongoing war with Japan. Churchill had considered this to be a frustrating waste of time.

When Churchill and Stalin met face to face, they discussed the future of Poland in the event of an Allied victory. Both agreed that it would be divided, the eastern section coming under Soviet administration while the western portion would retain independence. No matter the outcome of the war, Poland would never be the same.

Chapter 7 – Enigma, Bombe, and Colossus

Bletchley Park, a 19th-century mansion located in Milton Keynes, England, was the compound in which British intelligence operatives did their daily work. It was divided into several numbered Huts during WWII, and specialized code-breaking and communications staff were stationed there secretly. At least two Soviet spies frequented the property, acting as double agents for the Soviets as well as MI5 or MI6. These were Anthony Blunt and John Cairncross.

Since the UK and U.S.S.R. were forced into an uneasy alliance against Germany, the work of spying was dependent on saving information that the British military and government simply didn't think was necessary to pass on to the Soviets. For Blunt and other communist spies, this equated to secret codes and messages interpreted from German radio communications. Understanding the enemy's intentions proved incredibly difficult, even for the most seasoned members of the British forces. They were forced to recruit the nation's top mathematicians and cryptanalysts and put them to work trying to decipher a constant string of codes.

One of those recruits was Alan Turing, ironically a peer of the Cambridge Five. Having studied advanced mathematics at Cambridge University's King's College in the early 1930s, he went on to earn his doctoral degree from Princeton University in the United States. When war broke out in Europe, Turing had not only laid out plans for an electronic computing device but actually built most of the prototype. Able to multiply binary numbers, the device was essentially an early model of a scientific calculator. Turing's work on this machine was Britain's hope for cracking the German codes, which were created on a machine called Enigma.

Enigma had been created by the German engineer Arthur Scherbius at the end of WWI, and the technology was pulled into the service of Hitler's army before the commencement of WWII. Enigma machines were also sent to Japan and Italy to keep their own communications safely encrypted from the Allies. Fortunately for the Brits, Allied spies had discovered key information about the Enigma machine, such as how the plug-wiring system functioned. Armed with this data, Turing and his team of code-breakers got to work fine-tuning their own machine to understand the daily barrage of German naval transmissions. They worked daily at the Government Communications Headquarters in Bletchley Park.

The Enigma machine was straightforward to use but complex to decode. To make it work, an operator set their machine to a specific cipher. Then, he or she would type the true message into the machine using type-face keys. For each letter key pressed, a light was activated on a secondary set of letters, indicating which letter should be used to replace the original. Letter by letter, the operator wrote the coded letters down and sent the complete coded message via Morse code on radio frequencies. The Allies could overhear these messages, but without the cipher, they could not understand what was being communicated.

Improving upon a Polish code-breaking machine called bomba kryptologiczna, Turing created his own version, the bombe, which checked possible Enigma code combinations against a piece of text that was expected to turn up in the coded message. The rotors of the bombe mechanically checked the cipher possibilities until a contradiction was discovered. Due to the specific programming of the Enigma, it was not possible for a letter to be coded as itself, so when the Turing Machine encountered such an occurrence, it discarded the potential cipher it had been testing and moved on to the next. Together with a team that included Gordon Welchman, Turing fed the bombe different texts until finally one matched a cipher run by the machine. From 1941 until the end of the war, the Bletchley Park team was able to decipher an estimated 2.5 million messages—around 3,000 per day during its most productive period.

Morse code transmissions were not the only communicative forms being used, either by the Axis or the Allies. A new sort of radio traffic was discovered at the onset of the war that was clearly meant to be processed by a different sort of machine altogether. These communications were sent and received on an apparatus that the teams at Bletchley Park never saw in person until 1945 but which the Germans referred to as "s*ägefisch*," or sawfish. The Brits therefore used the word "fish" when there was teleprinter traffic and referred to the unknown machine as "Tunny," as in "tunafish." The machine is formally called the Lorenz.

During one particular 4,000-letter Tunny transmission in 1941, British operatives noticed immediately that the receiving party in Austria replied with an uncoded message asking the first party to retransmit. The coded message was resubmitted, this time shortening the transmission with abbreviations. By comparing the two transmissions and analyzing the abbreviated differences, Bletchley Park was able to make assumptions about

how the Lorenz machine functioned. The research team passed this information on to mathematician Bill Tutte, whose diligent hand-written repetition of the original ciphers revealed vital clues as to the inner-workings of the Lorenz. A team that included several members of Turing's own group broke the cipher within four months of the key transmission. Next, a complex computing machine was built to decode the so-called Tunny transmissions automatically. It was called Colossus. Alan Turing's mathematical research helped fellow codebreaker Tommy Flowers develop the infamous machine.

Turing, Flowers, and their fellow teammates' work was essential to the war effort, but it was also a huge boon to the Soviet espionage ring working within various departments of the British government. By the time agents at Bletchley Park had learned how to crack the Enigma codes, former Cambridge student John Cairncross had found himself stationed at Bletchley as a translator. Having studied German at university, it was Cairncross who took Turing's deciphered messages and rewrote them in English. Though historians can't be sure if the two ever met during this time, it is unlikely since each military intelligence department was kept secure and isolated from the next.

Nevertheless, Bletchley Park and British intelligence was not short of Cambridge graduates, many who may or may not have recognized one another as such. In fact, Cairncross was recruited to the British Foreign Office by fellow Cambridge graduate Jack Klugman, who was also a member of the NKVD. As for his own work with the Soviets, that was down to Anthony Blunt, Cairncross' recruiter. During his time at Bletchley Park, John Cairncross took Enigma translations with him when he left work and headed to the local train station. There, he put the papers in a bag and traveled onward to London, where he met with Soviet contacts and handed them over. Between his and Blunt's data, the Soviets had plenty to work with.

Chapter 8 – Espionage and the Battle of Kursk

Cairncross didn't only betray Bletchley Park operatives by smuggling out Enigma translations; he also supplied his Soviet handlers with raw data from Colossus. In doing so, he probably believed that he was simply performing a necessary function within the Allied network. After all, Great Britain and the Soviets were actively communicating and sharing information about German military plans; however, Prime Minister Winston Churchill agreed with top military advisors that though their Soviet allies should know of German plans, they needn't know how this data was collected. Cairncross' information served to fill in the gaps for Stalin and his military elite.

According to his wife, Gayle Cairncross-Gow, in a post-Cold War interview, John very carefully considered his position between British and Soviet intelligences. He wrote,

> Perhaps the influence which stirred me most, and forced me to rethink my position, was the news that the Germans were continuing to drive ever deeper into the Russian heartland in the south. My concern, even so, was not only for our ally, who was suffering huge losses: if the Russians were forced further and further back, it seemed elementary to me that there was a danger of their being reduced to conducting a guerrilla or marginal war, or even of collapsing. In that event the Germans would be able to switch a large block of their forces either to the Italian or North African fronts, or, worse still, to launch them against Britain.

To help protect both countries that he cared about, Cairncross chose to go ahead with the transfer of vital German communications. He admitted later that he neither wanted to be a long-term spy for Stalin nor a lifelong affiliate of the KGB. Rather, he simply used these contacts to help himself serve the interests of his own moral code—to fight fascism. It was in this vein that John decided to hand over a crucial piece of data that had come out of Colossus: the specific location of the German Luftwaffe, or air force. This piece of information directly impacted a serious turning point in the war.

It was the beginning of 1943 when the situation came to a head once more following the intensive Battle of Stalingrad that had stretched excruciatingly

from August of the previous year into the early days of February. The Soviets had secured their city but not without intense damage and half a million casualties in total. While Soviet forces tried to regroup, German troops left in the outlying wilderness to survive the winter struggled to regain their strength. Heavily weakened but determined to clear the Nazis out of his territory, Stalin sent as many new troops into the city as he could summon to keep them clear of the lingering enemy forces. The Soviets moved to the south, attempting to cut off the remaining German groups from each other and finish them off. In all, the Soviets gathered over a million troops, 3,600 tanks, and nearly 300 aircraft to ensure their success in defending their city.

The Soviets halted their original offensive plan when their intelligence teams received information from Cairncross that the Germans were planning to attack the city of Kursk. Stalin himself orchestrated the army's next moves, paying careful attention to Cairncross' locational data concerning nearby Luftwaffe airfields. During the siege of Stalingrad, it had been the German air force that had caused the most significant damage; the Soviets were understandably wary of the Luftwaffe and understood the importance of rewriting their plans to reflect the existence of several airfields.

Thanks to crucial data from their spies, the Soviet Red Army prepared intensively for a German force that was expected to be heavy in armored tanks and aircraft, since their infantry was so small and weary. To this effect, the Reds planted anti-tank mines extensively throughout the location where the battle was to take place. They dug and prepared clusters of anti-tank gun nests. Their own tanks and infantry were brought in, and small groups of specialized troops infiltrated Nazi camps to destroy their transport and communication networks.

As for the Germans, their plan of attack, as usual, depended heavily on the use of aircraft. The Axis forces decided to move in with the Luftwaffe, clear the air above the battleground of opposing planes, and then create a makeshift border around the perimeter where aircraft could attack supply vehicles and reinforcements and prevent them from reaching their comrades in need. In the final stages of the battle, the German pilots would turn their attention to the center of the fray and help finish off the enemy tanks and soldiers. It was a plan that had worked many times before and that probably would have worked again if it hadn't been for the teams at Bletchley Park and the administrations of John Cairncross.

The Battle of Kursk lasted a week before Hitler canceled it altogether. Not

only were the Soviets successful in protecting yet another city from the Axis, but their preparations for that particular battle were so well-executed that attacking German forces never managed to break through the fortified lines. The rout was effective enough that Hitler's army didn't manage any further sieges along the Eastern Front for the remaining two years of the war. Instead, Hitler began drawing his troops out of France and diverting them to the Mediterranean, where the Allies had begun an invasion of Sicily.

Chapter 9 – Project Venona

While Burgess, Blunt, Cairncross, and Maclean worked diligently to collect and deliver data to the Soviets, a new project was launched in 1943 by American intelligence cryptanalyst, Miss Gene Grabeel. Known as Venona, the project was a counterintelligence unit whose goal was to intercept and decode communications between the various Soviet intelligence agencies. Focused on the Committee for State Security (KGB), the NKVD, and the Main Intelligence Directorate (GRU), Venona operatives were dedicated to finding Soviet secrets. Of course, five of those secrets were very close at hand.

At the close of the Second World War in 1945, Venona gained importance in Britain due to the ceased communications between the UK and the U.S.S.R. It was the start of the Cold War, and every Western nation wanted to know what was going on behind the so-called Iron Curtain that split Europe in two. The Soviet Union had signed the Warsaw Pact in Poland, effectively creating a socialist divide that ran right down the middle of Germany and its capital of Berlin. On the western side was West Germany, Austria, Italy, and Yugoslavia; on the eastern side was East Germany, Poland, Czechoslovakia, Hungary, Romania, Bulgaria, and the U.S.S.R. At Stalin's urging, there was little communication between the sides. In fact, post-WWII Soviet Russia was quieter and more mysterious than ever. Venona operatives hoped to shed some light on that silence.

The intercepted messages from Soviet intelligence organizations were encrypted using a one-time pad. Considered one of the most secure methods of cryptology, one-time pad messages transmitted properly cannot be decoded. To encode a message using this method, each letter of the message is assigned a random, specialized number (not simple integers like 1-9) and rewritten using that code. The success of one-time pad use depends on each particular key only being used once and never repeated; it also requires that the recipient has the key. Anyone who intercepts the message will be unable to crack that one-time code, even with the use of sophisticated computer programs.

This put an immense strain on members of Project Venona, so Britain sent some of its most trusted intelligence officers to help with the project. One of

those officers was none other than Kim Philby, who set off to Washington D.C. in the 1940s to act as a liaison between MI6 and America's Central Intelligence Agency (CIA). During Philby's time in the United States, which lasted into the 1950s, he integrated very well into the American organization, though there were regular clashes between MI6 and the CIA as to which group should lead specific investigations.

It has been alleged that Philby had a romantic relationship with the Chief of CIA Counterintelligence, James Jesus Angleton, and while it can be neither proven nor disproven, the two certainly did enjoy a close friendship. Angleton may have allowed Philby access to higher-classified intelligence than he was formally due, but most of the relays Philby made to the Soviets during this time only helped the Allied cause. Specifically, he helped prove that neither the United States nor Great Britain planned to make a deal with Hitler and betray their Soviet ally.

By 1944, the CIA had taken a keen interest in Soviet internal affairs and set up counterintelligence protocols to intercept intelligence transmissions within the U.S.S.R. It was a dangerous time for Kim Philby and all of his Cambridge Five colleagues since some of those very transmissions contained their code names. Philby was "Stanley," Burgess was "Hicks," Maclean was "Homer," Blunt was "Tony," and Cairncross was "Liszt." According to the CIA, Philby outed a Soviet defector who was about to turn on him that same year, resulting in the death of the former operative. The Kremlin was very harsh on traitors or anyone believed to potentially undermine the authority and power of the Soviet Union. It wasn't the last time Philby's decisions caused death at the hands of the U.S.S.R. When a list of influential Catholic Germans came into his possession at the CIA, Philby passed it on to the Soviets without hesitation. The latter treated it as a kill list.

Where the other members of the Cambridge spy ring often lamented the death and tragedy they found themselves amongst, Philby was a hard-line Soviet supporter who purposefully overlooked the negative implications of his job. "It cannot be so very surprising that I adopted a Communist viewpoint in the 1930s," he said later. "So many of my contemporaries made the same choice. But many of those who made that choice in those days changed sides when some of the worst features of Stalinism became apparent. I stayed the course."

Kim Philby was in America in the aftermath of the Second World War when Project Venona gained significant importance. American operative Richard

Hallock had discovered that the Soviets were reusing some of their one-time pad keys for coded radio transmissions, which meant that some decryption could actually take place. Agents pored over their existing information, searching for more duplications that could be used to at least partially uncover the meaning of the Soviet's messages. Hallock's team found the duplicated material and passed it onto Meredith Gardner, who used the information to translate data straight from the KGB. She was responsible for cracking the code that revealed a very serious leak: The Soviets were talking about Project Manhattan, the American-led nuclear program.

This proved the existence of Soviet spies within the nuclear research facilities, one of whom was Klaus Fuchs. Philby likely warned Fuchs that he was in danger before passing this information dutifully on to his Soviet handlers, thereby directly contributing to the most crucial issue of the Cold War: potential nuclear war. Joseph Stalin already had his own plans to go nuclear, but these were not seriously pursued during the first few years of the war. Upon learning that the Americans were working with the British and Canadians to develop bombs, however, Stalin put the project into high gear and concentrated on stealing secrets directly from America's own researchers and scientists. This data, coupled with nuclear-relevant data delivered from Soviet spies in Germany, served as the foundation of the Soviet's nuclear program.

The nuclear arms race had begun, causing the members of the Cold War to suffer from sometimes extreme anxiety and paranoia about where and when a bomb might be dropped. School children practiced hiding under their desks and strapping on gas masks. At the peak of the Cold War, the U.S.S.R. had amassed an estimated 40,000 nuclear warheads; the U.S. had stockpiled more than 30,000.

Chapter 10 – Allied Insurgents in Albania

To the west of the immense nation that was the Russian Soviet Socialist Republic lay a small country whose citizens were split between a belief in communism, cultural ties with the non-Soviet Yugoslavia, and royalists whose king had been deposed at the beginning of WWII: Albania. Four years after the end of the war, former Allied nations turned on their one-time collaborator and planned a highly secretive infiltration that would capitalize on the weakness of communist Albania to destabilize the entire Soviet Union.

Though Albania was not a member of the U.S.S.R, it was an independent communist state with strong economic ties to the Soviet Union. Under the leadership of Enver Hoxha, the nation of one million tried to right itself under the banner of socialism after it had been devastated by the Axis. British and American intelligence agencies worked together to recruit Albanian expatriates and anti-communists who hoped to reconstruct post-war Albania as a nation under the leadership of King Zog. These new agents would be parachuted into the Mati region of Albania, where the king enjoyed the most support. There, they would rally the citizens into a revolt and begin a civil war, with America and Britain favoring the royalist side. The Allies hoped that this would inspire other easternmost members of the Soviet Union to revolt in a similar way, throwing the communist nation into chaos.

The first infiltration was less than successful, with the agents failing to incite a revolt amongst the citizens of Mati. More teams were sent over the following years, but little was achieved, and Albania remained a long way off from civil war. Ramping up their efforts, American and British agencies started working with Greece and Italy to attract new recruits with military or guerilla experience. They were recruited and trained for special sabotage missions, during which teams were deployed to various locations in Albania. Nearly every time a team covertly entered the country, however, Hoxha's army was waiting for it. Untold special agents were killed or pursued until they defected into nearby Greece.

Why did the Hoxha administration seem to always know the right place and the right time? Unbeknownst to the orchestrators of the Albanian project, they'd been operating with an internal mole since the very beginning: their liaison, Kim Philby. Up to date on the very finest details of the infiltration,

Philby kept the Soviets in the loop about every infiltration, and Stalin's government kept Hoxha well-informed. The matter was morally delicate, even for an expatriate spy: Though potentially tens of thousands of lives were spared from civil war thanks to Philby's actions, he also ensured the deaths of most of the insurgents. According to Philby's memoirs, Albania was not the only targeted nation for Cold War subversion, though the Allies' attempts in China, North Vietnam, and Ukraine also failed. Philby did his job well.

As for Albania, the country struggled to consolidate itself under Soviet-led government and eventually declared itself an independent socialist republic in 1955. At that time, the U.S.S.R. had a new leader in Nikita Khrushchev, following the death of Stalin two years earlier. Khrushchev continued to work with the network of spies Stalin and his secret police had cultivated, but his policies of eradicating much of his predecessor's anti-Marxist work were at odds with those of Enver Hoxha. While Khrushchev worked to dissemble forced labor camps and rid the Soviet Union of its myth-like adoration of Stalin, Hoxha created the People's Socialist Republic of Albania. The country didn't fall into civil war until long after the collapse of the Soviet Union.

Chapter 11 – The Downfall of the Cambridge Five

Project Venona was ultimately the undoing of all five of the Cambridge Soviet recruits. The first to catch on to the fact that Venona had identified them was Kim Philby, still stationed in Washington D.C. He asked Burgess—who was sharing a living space with him at the time—to go back to London and warn Donald Maclean that his name was at the top of the list of suspects. Guy managed to get himself sent home for bad behavior in 1951—not a tough week's work for the overdrinker—and immediately told Maclean of the impending danger. By that same summer, both Burgess and Maclean had disappeared into the Soviet Union. Burgess died early, in 1963, from arteriosclerosis and liver failure brought on by his habit of heavy drinking. His ashes were sent home to be buried in the family plot in West Meon.

It didn't take much detective work to track their disappearance back to Kim Philby in the United States. The CIA told MI6 to take him back and fire him; if not, there would be no more working together for British and American intelligence offices. Philby resigned his position but was ultimately cleared of any charges of espionage in 1955. After a short stint in journalism, MI6 hired him back as a contact in the Middle East. In 1963, however, Philby allegedly confessed his role in the war to a friend in the secret service and quickly disappeared into the Soviet Union for fear of being arrested.

As for Anthony Blunt, his cover was blown in 1964 when a former Soviet spy living in America outed him. During their time at university together, Blunt had tried unsuccessfully to recruit that very same man, one Michael Whitney Strange. The accusation was a huge embarrassment to Blunt who had been a trusted presence within none other than the royal palaces during and after the war. In his capacity as an art historian, Blunt had been named Surveyor of the King's Pictures by King George VI in 1945. After the king's death in 1952, he continued on as Surveyor of the Queen's Pictures for Queen Elizabeth II.

Blunt also volunteered in the royal libraries. In the final year of the Second World War, he'd personally been tasked with taking Owen Morshead, the Royal Librarian, to the German palace Schloss Friedrichshof to retrieve sensitive letters written to Empress Victoria, as well as letters between the Duke of Windsor and Adolf Hitler. The mission was a success, and the letters

were deposited in the royal archives.

Because Blunt—actually, Sir Anthony Blunt, as of 1956—had held such sensitive positions during his career and had access to the royal houses as well as British intelligence offices, his confession was kept strictly secret. Both the palace and the British secret service vowed to keep his involvement with the Soviets secret for 15 years. Not even Prime Minister Anthony Eden was told of Blunt's treasonous activities. Blunt himself was kept from punishment by agreeing to name his fellow conspirators. Among those names was that of John Cairncross. Queen Elizabeth II made no formal statement on the subject of her former employee and allowed him to keep his knighthood. It was never clear if this was as a show of affection for the man or simply a way not to draw attention to the situation.

John Cairncross had actually already offered up his own confession in 1952 without so much as an investigation into his culpability. His job in the British exchequer was quickly withdrawn, and with no prospects, Cairncross moved to the United States to become a university lecturer. With his spy life behind him, he proved to be a brilliant intellectual whose passion lie with French literature. Eventually, he moved to Rome and took up a job with the United Nations translating within the Food and Agriculture department. His role in the Soviet spy ring was not public knowledge until the 1970s when it became headline news. He avoided the spotlight by living abroad but spent the last year of his life in Britain once more, married to an American opera singer. He died of a stroke in 1995.

Anthony Blunt's involvement with the Soviet spy ring was publicly announced in 1979 by Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher, at which point Queen Elizabeth II was forced to take away the knighthood that she herself had bestowed upon him. Despondent, Blunt wrote his own memoirs near the end of his life but stipulated that they not be published until an appropriate time. In those pages, Blunt says he came to believe that joining the Soviets was "the biggest mistake" of his life. On being caught as a spy, he noted: "I realised I would take any risk in this country rather than go to Russia." He was the only member of the spy ring who did not immediately leave the UK after being discovered, either permanently or temporarily. The memoir was finally made public in 2009, 26 years after Anthony's death in 1983.

Donald Maclean acclimated quite well to his new Soviet home. He learned Russian and found employment at *International Affairs* magazine after a short time of teaching English. Eventually, Maclean was offered positions in

the Soviet Foreign Ministry and the Institute of World Economy and International Relations. Considered an incredible asset to the Soviet Union, he received the prestigious Order of the Red Banner of Labour. He died of pneumonia in 1983, and his ashes were sent back to England for burial in Penn, Buckinghamshire.

Kim Philby, though he professed to miss nothing from the UK, except for a few friends, Lea & Perrins Worcestershire sauce, and Colman’s mustard, was never happy in the Soviet Union. Soon after defecting, he became depressed and alcoholic. Said his wife, Rufina Pukhova: "Kim believed in a just society and devoted his whole life to communism. And here he was struck by disappointment, brought to tears. He said, 'Why do old people live so badly here? After all, they won the war.'" Kim Philby died in the U.S.S.R. in 1988.

Chapter 12 – A Surprise Addendum

The Soviet Union crumbled in 1991, just a scant few years after the deaths of most of the Cambridge Five spies. The horror stories of life under Stalin and the failures of a state that never truly practiced communism have been revealed to the world, and no one was more surprised than the members of the nations who'd feared the Soviet Union since the end of WWII. The roles of the Cambridge Soviet spies were long since passed, and it was believed that their remaining secrets had died with them. Far away, however, hidden in the archives of the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation (CBC) was a film reel that had just a little more to say on the matter.

The film contained a 1959 interview between Guy Burgess—long considered the most mysterious and charismatic of the Cambridge Five—and a Canadian news show called *Close-Up*. Unlabeled since its original air date, the film was only recently identified by CBC archivist Arthur Schwartzel in 2015. Said Schwartzel, "I thought the first people who should see it were the Brits."

Shot by Erik Durschmied, a highly-touted Austrian-born Canadian cinematographer who also met and filmed the likes of Fidel Castro and Saddam Hussein, the long-lost film was created in Moscow, eight years after Burgess had defected to the Soviet Union.

CBC invited Jo Bennett, the British historian for the British Intelligence Service, plus a bevy of researchers, journalists, and even spy authors to view the film for the first time since it had been put away and forgotten in the archive. Journalist Robert Elf was the only person present to have met Burgess in person—in fact, they met on several occasions. "He used to turn up in our parties. Suddenly you found this figure, in his shiny dark-blue suit and dirty Italian tie, gulping your whiskey."

As the small group gathered to watch the lost film, the black and white newsreel flickered to life, and a commanding, rather old-fashioned Canadian voice overlaid the images of a dull, colorless Kremlin.

"In Moscow last week, *Close-Up* met Guy Burgess and interviewed him in the shadow of the Kremlin." After showing an old passport photo of the man in question from 1951, the announcer goes on. "A lifetime later, Burgess speaks to the West for the first time about his defection."

A moment later, there appears the unassuming visage of an overcoated man in his late 40s. In an almost laughably quintessential high-class British accent, Burgess tells the camera, “I simply went as a tourist. I and my friend approached the Russians, said ‘Could we come in?’ They kept us waiting in Prague for some weeks”—and here Burgess rolls his eyes in that famous flamboyant way he had—“and then agreed.”

The interviewer then asked if it was true that Burgess hoped to go back to England to live.

“I want to live in the Soviet Union because I am a socialist and it is a socialist country, and I enjoy doing so. On the other hand, naturally, everybody likes his own country best. Immediately, I would rather like to go back to England for a month to see my family. But I will never do that unless I can be quite certain that I can get out of England and come back to Russia.”

The Brits watching the film were baffled as to why the interview wasn’t picked up by the British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC), a television company that often worked closely with the CBC. “We had no idea he wanted to come back to England,” one viewer remarked, noting that had Britain realized this potential bargaining chip existed, Burgess may have been persuaded to answer lingering questions about his participation in Cold War sabotage.

The authoritative *Close-Up* host told his interviewee, “Everybody considered you and Maclean to be traitors. What have you to say to that, Mr. Burgess?”

“It’s no use me saying I’m not a traitor; that means nothing. ‘Course I’m not. But only I know that.”

None of the infamous five were ever prosecuted in Great Britain or abroad for their roles as Soviet spies and double agents within the British intelligence. Philby and Burgess lived the remainder of their lives in Moscow, the former disappointed at the failings of Soviet leadership in relation to Marxist ideals. Maclean seems to have been the only member of the group to have truly prospered in the communist nation for which they had all accomplished so much.

Many historians and researchers believe to this day that there were more than five major operatives working for the Soviet Union while performing highly secretive jobs for British intelligence. Among those who have been considered are fellow Cambridge students Leo Long, Andrew Gow, Wilfred Mann, Victor Rothschild, and another known friend of Burgess who studied

in Germany, Guy Liddell. All were connected with either Burgess, Blunt, Maclean, Philby, or Cairncross either during university or the war.

Spy novelists can only continue to speculate.

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